

British Foreign Policy, the United States and Europe, 1945-1950

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ABSTRACT

During the Second World War, recognizing the limits of Britain's ability to respond to a post-war continental threat, the Foreign Office pursued a number of initiatives to engage the United States in Europe.

Whilst unable to overcome American reluctance to engage directly in Europe, the British successfully gained their commitment to a new international organisation, which became the United Nations. In the aftermath of war Britain's status as a world power was undermined by her economic dependence on the United States, and the perception of the two new superpowers that Britain was now only a junior partner in the tripartite alliance.

However, the alliance was fragile, and by responding to the events of the five years after the war, the Foreign Office, making the most of its limited resources, succeeded in engaging the United States in Western European reconstruction and security.

But whereas the Foreign Office had earlier believed that they could exploit the power of the United States to enhance Britain's status, by 1950 the Americans had, ironically, recognized that the support of Britain and her Empire would enhance their policy of containing the Soviet Union.

In loving memory of Jenny Pooler who
died tragically young before the final
submission of this work.

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INTRODUCTION

In the early years of Cold War analysis there developed a particular American view of the origins of the conflict. Historians in the United States had greater access to government documents than their British counterparts who were limited by the “fifty year” statute requiring documents to be withheld from public scrutiny for fifty years. Fortunately for British historians in 1968, the then Labour government amended the rule so that documents could be released into the public domain after thirty years.

Consequently there emerged in the ensuing two decades after the first release of documents in 1977, a more informed analysis of the formative years of the Cold War from a British perspective. Although various memoirs published after World War Two had suggested a greater British involvement in the engagement of the United States in the post-war international scenario than had hitherto been suggested.¹ The newly released documents confirmed the veracity of the earlier accounts.

What emerged as British historians mined the archives of the Public Record Office was a prolonged debate as to the benefits of various initiatives, which would not only

¹ Prominent works were: Churchill, W.S., *The Second World War*, vols. 1-6, 1950; Williams, F., *Portrait of a Great English Gentleman, Ernest Bevin*, 1952; Avon, Earl, *The Eden Memoirs, the Reckoning*, 1965; Gladwyn, Lord, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn*, 1972.

Francis Williams, in his intimate portrait of the post-war Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, revealed that he had used the 1947 crisis in Greece to provoke an American reaction. The result was the eponymous Truman Doctrine, which perhaps more than any event apart from the Marshall Plan, again exploited by Bevin, eventually set the course of the post-war ideological conflict.

Others have disagreed with Williams’s conclusion, not least Robert Frazier, in his essay in *Historical Journal*, 27.2, 1984, pp. 715-727, ‘Did Britain Start the Cold War? Bevin and the Truman Doctrine’. Although Frazier had access to the archives, it is fair to say that Francis Williams had the advantage of personal contact with his subject. (See Chapter Three.)

maintain Britain's status as a world power, but also safeguard the immediate continent and the Empire.

In the 1980s, and the early years of the following decade, a rich harvest of monographs and essays were published which revealed the British diplomatic and political response to the emerging conflict. Prominent amongst the former were works by Victor Rothwell, whose analysis of wartime and immediate post-war British diplomacy with respect to the United States and the Soviet Union relied much on the emerging archives, and Julian Lewis who provided a detailed account of the various security initiatives for Western Europe and the debate ensuing between the diplomats and the military.²

² Rothwell, V., *Britain and the Cold War 1941-1947*, 1982; Lewis, J., *Changing Direction, British Military Planning for Post-War Strategic Defence, 1942-1947*, 1988. Various other works contributed to the growing consensus that Britain's diplomats and politicians had contributed far more to the advent of the Cold War than had hitherto been suggested.

Other prominent publications exploring British policy, both during and after World War II, with respect to the United States and the Soviet Union, included: Anderson, T.H., *The United States, Great Britain and the Cold War 1944-1947*, 1981; Barker, E., *The British Between the Superpowers, 1945-50*, 1983; two works by John Baylis, *Anglo-American Defence Relations 1939-1980: The Special Relationship*, 1983, and *Diplomacy of Pragmatism; Britain and the Formation of NATO, 1942-1949*, 1983; Brewer, S.A., *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States During World War Two*, 1997; Charmley, J., *Churchill's Grand Alliance, the Anglo-American Special Relationship 1940-1957*, 1995; Anne Deighton contributed two impressive works, one as editor, to the understanding of the dilemmas facing Britain after the war, *Britain and the First Cold War*, 1990, and *The Impossible Peace: Britain and the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War*, 1993; the former British diplomat, Robin Edmonds, provided a detailed account of Anglo-American relations after the war in the context of international events, *The United States and Britain 1945-1950*, 1986; in the same year Fraser J. Harbutt contributed an American perspective on the British contribution, particularly that of Winston Churchill, to Anglo-American relations with the Soviet Union, *The Iron Curtain, Churchill, America and the Origins of the Cold War*, 1986. Further analysis of Anglo-American relations during this critical period was provided by: Hathaway, R. *Ambiguous Partnership: Britain and America, 1944-47*, 1981; Hogan, M.J., *The Marshall Plan, America and Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe 1947-1952*, 1989; Louis, W.R., *Imperialism at Bay, the United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire 1941-1945*, 1986; the same author and Hedley Bull collaborated in editing a number of essays in, *The 'Special Relationship': Anglo-American Relations Since 1945*, 1986. Earlier Ritchie Owendale provided a more political aspect to British post-war deliberations in his monograph *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Government 1945-1951*, 1984; whilst David Reynolds contributed an in depth view of the formative years of the Anglo-American compact in, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance 1937-41, A Study in Competitive Co-operation*, 1981.

Three other works have contributed most significantly to our understanding of the policies pursued and in particular the men who instigated and developed them. John Kent, *British Imperial Strategy and the Origins of the Cold War 1944-49*, provided an in depth analysis of the British attempts, through economic and military strategy, to retain equality with the United States and the Soviet Union by exploiting the resources of the Empire, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, and reasserting Britain's role in the Middle East.

Whereas both John Saville and Alan Bullock have revealed much about the 'mind' of the Foreign Office, particularly in the case of the latter the outstanding influence of Ernest Bevin, not only within the department, but also on the national and international scene.

In his study of the first year of the new Labour government's foreign policy, *The Politics of Continuity, British Foreign Policy and the Labour Government 1945-46*, John Saville underlined, as the title suggests, the continuity of policy that developed between it and the preceding wartime coalition government. However, it was the

Likewise many authors provided analysis of, particularly, post-war British foreign policy in various journals. Of particular note these include: Adamthwaite, A., 'Britain and the World. 1945-9: the view from the Foreign Office', *International Affairs*, 61.2, 1985; Boyle, P.G., 'The British Foreign Office View of Soviet-American Relations 1945-46', *Diplomatic History*, 3.3, 1979, and 'The British Foreign Office and American Foreign policy 1947-48', *The Journal of American Studies*, 16, 1982; Frazier, R., 'Did Britain Start the Cold War? Bevin and the Truman Doctrine', *Historical Journal*, 27.3, 1984; Merrick, R., 'The Russia Committee of the British Foreign Office and the Cold War 1946-47', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20.3, 1985; Smith, R., 'The Climate of Opinion: British Officials and the Development of British Soviet Policy 1945-7', *International Affairs*, 64.4, 1988; Zametica, J., 'The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee Reconsidered, 1945-7', *Diplomatic History*, 13.4, 1989; and in the same edition Warner, G., 'The Anglo-American Special Relationship'.

opening chapter of this work, which provided the diplomatic historians with perhaps the most interesting insight into the workings of the elite Foreign Office.

Saville observed that no other, 'department of state' illustrated 'the process of continuity...than the Foreign Office after 1945.' The process of continuity was deeply ingrained in a service where the leading civil servants' experience and upbringing reflected the 19th century rather than the new era emerging, both nationally and internationally. Men such as Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary during the war and for the first six months after, and his deputy Orme Sargent who took over after Cadogan moved to the United Nations as Britain's first representative. Although the latter was educated at Radley and did not go to university his family background and experience paralleled that of his predecessor.

Many had served in the foreign service since before the First World War, during the days when Britain was the supreme world power and the Empire was the mainstay and almost the sole purpose of the Foreign Office. None were really equipped to recognise the facts of life: that the Empire could no longer sustain Britain's position and status in the new world order, although as Saville observed there was a general agreement that the Soviet Union presented, 'the central threat' in the 'post-war world.'³

It was Ernest Bevin who introduced some reforms in the foreign service, although not so root and branch as many of his Labour colleagues and supporters anticipated, and in the view of his definitive biographer, Alan Bullock, he 'brought together as

³ Saville, J., *The Politics of Continuity, British Foreign Policy and the Labour Government 1945-46*, 1993, pp. 10-80.

strong a team as any British Foreign Secretary has ever led, several of them of middle-class rather than upper-class origins.’⁴

Historians, and the general reader, are indebted to Alan Bullock for his immeasurable contribution to the study of this critical period in Cold War history. His, at times highly personalised, account of British post-war foreign policy pursued by a well educated elite and an auto didactic, working class, ex-trade unionist Foreign Secretary, revealed, more than perhaps any other work, the dilemmas, the restrictions and the opportunities confronting the British in the intricate web of diplomatic manoeuvring which followed the Second World War.

As the British establishment attempted to come to terms with the emerging new world order, it became evident that much of the debate as to Britain’s future commitment to European security, with or without the support of the United States, was often driven by the members of Western European governments exiled in the country during the war. (See particularly Chapter One, Trygve Lie’s proposal for a shared bases plan, and the pressure exerted on the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden,

⁴ Bullock, A., *Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary 1945-1951*, p. 98. The first call for Ernest Bevin to conduct substantial reforms of the Foreign Office appeared in an editorial in the left wing journal, *The New Statesman*, shortly after he had assumed office. Two editorials, spread over consecutive weeks in August 1945, called upon the new Foreign Secretary to undertake the first substantial reform of his new department since 1907. Although there had been a limited attempt at reform during the war, the 1943 Foreign Services Act produced by Eden and Bevin, the *New Statesman* did not believe that this had gone far enough.

It was considered that the social background of many of the incumbent staff poorly equipped them to ‘judge of social, political and economic trends and to express an objective opinion on them.’ ‘Mr. Bevin and the Foreign Office’, *New Statesman and Nation*, 4-11/8/45.

Anthony Adamthwaite has suggested that Bevin was incorrectly vilified for not reforming the Foreign Office. He cites figures for restructuring by the end of 1947: ‘For example, of 147 members of the foreign service of senior rank in 1943, nearly half had left...including seventeen forced retirements.’ Adamthwaite, *International Affairs*, 1985.

by the exiled Foreign Ministers from Belgium and Holland, for Britain to assume the lead in the formation of an integrated Western European Bloc.)

Other policies and developments were exiguous responses to events; a perfect example being the reaction to Roosevelt's springing of the Atlantic Charter on the unsuspecting Churchill at the Placentia Bay meeting in 1941. (Again see Chapter One which covers in some detail the Foreign Office response to a proposal which struck at the heart of the Empire.) The response was a realistic analysis of Britain's post-war options, that included a perceptive grasp of the opportunities emerging on the other side of the Atlantic by Gladwyn Jebb, a member of the younger generation of diplomats, which succeeded in adumbrating a policy which eventually engaged the United States in a new world organisation.

What appears to be lacking, despite all the foregoing works and studies, is an overarching account of the British Foreign Office's attempts to bolster Britain's role in the emerging world order, and the machinations by the diplomats to engage the economic and military might of the United States in the reconstruction and security of Western Europe to confront either a resurgent Germany or, as was finally concluded, an expansionist Soviet Union.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to redress this singular gap in the study of the development of the Cold War through the examination of memoirs, secondary sources and, as much as possible, documents available at the Public Record Office which have rarely been referred to. What emerges is a complex, and at times, confused response by the foreign service and their political masters to a complex and confusing

international situation. Significantly, although there was a general acceptance of the need to engage the power of the United States to resolve the dilemmas the Foreign Office confronted as the post-war international situation became ever more apparent, there was always a condescending, paternalistic approach by British diplomats and politicians to any Anglo-American cooperation. Throughout this study there will be instances of this attitude, which so much reflected the determination of both diplomats and politicians in London to retain a preponderant role.

Of course no such analysis could ignore the development of British policy during the Second World War, and as briefly as possible, the first chapter covers these formative years despite the period suggested by the title of this dissertation. The essential initiative to emerge, adumbrated by Gladwyn Jebb in 1942, was the engagement of the United States in a new world organisation. However, as will be revealed in the analysis of Trygve Lie's 'Bases Plan' and the 'Western Bloc' proposal that followed, there were doubts expressed by both the diplomats and the military, as to whether the Americans would engage in the security of Europe. At the same time there was deep scepticism as to the worth of any European commitment by Britain, no better personified than by the Prime Minister who was convinced that only an Anglo-American alliance would serve the country's interest.

Essential to any study of British post-war policy is Orme Sargent's seminal memorandum 'Stocktaking After VE Day'. Prepared, at the instigation of the then Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, as a brief for the British delegation to the Potsdam conference it revealed more than any other document the post-war dilemmas confronting Britain. But as John Saville has observed, Sargent's memorandum, 'stated

two of the three principal strands of policy inherited by the Labour Government', the 'recognition of the Soviet Union as the main hostile force in the world and the clear understanding of the crucial importance of the United States, and its material strength.'⁵

One essential feature to emerge from the bulging, and indeed somewhat daunting, 'Stocktaking' file at the Public Record Office is the deliberative process which appears to have accompanied its circulation throughout Whitehall. As with Gladwyn Jebb's earlier assessment, 'The Four Power Plan' in 1942, Sargent's original document of 11 July 1945 provoked an intense debate amongst his fellow diplomats, which appears to have spread to other departments, lasting several weeks if not months. Both cases appear to indicate that there was an established process whereby such initiatives were subject to peer review, and eventually revision. The final draft of 'Stocktaking' includes many of the observations attached to the original by various sources.

As an example of this process, and because of its essential, eventual influence on British foreign policy, the whole of Chapter Two is devoted to an analysis of 'Stocktaking After VE Day' and its conclusions.

To say that immediate British post-war foreign policy was confused and still remarkably inchoate despite the wartime deliberations, and the emergence of Orme Sargent's urgent appeal for focus, would not be an understatement. The new Labour Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, was determined, as had been his predecessor

⁵ Saville, pp. 31-2.

Anthony Eden, to continue three-power cooperation through the United Nations. Both saw this as the way to cement Britain's future as a world power; neither was prepared to seriously consider alternatives, at least on the part of the former, till events conspired to change his view.

The final chapter of this study will attempt to provide a succinct analysis of the events led process by which the British Foreign Office, and its head Ernest Bevin, finally succeeded in engaging the United States in the reconstruction and security of Western Europe, thus creating the essential features of the ideological conflict of the next forty years. At the same time, contrary to previous policy emanating from Washington with respect to the dismantling of the British Empire,⁶ contemporary events led the United States to recognise the importance of this institution in the containment of the Soviet Union, and the consequent Anglo-American 'Special Relationship'.

⁶ Washington's intentions were clearly signalled at the Placentia Bay conference in August 1941, when Franklin Roosevelt caught Churchill off-guard by proposing an Atlantic Charter, which promised the right of all nations to self-determination. Though a generous interpretation could, as suggested by Churchill and other members of the War Cabinet when he returned to London, have restricted the promise to the European nations subjugated by Germany, there was a deep anti-imperialist movement both in the American administration and in society. Roosevelt had been much influenced by Woodrow Wilson and his post-World War One attempt to restrict the imperial depredations of the European powers, particularly in Africa, though there was an understanding in Washington that the British Empire was more enlightened.

Perhaps more worrying for the British was the requirement for a commitment to economic liberalisation, which had already been raised in the Lend-Lease negotiations and proved a serious topic of contention, and continued after the war to prolong the discussions in Washington by Maynard Keynes to obtain an American loan. (See chapter three.)

For a more in depth analysis of the Placentia Bay meeting see: Reynolds, D., *The Creation of Anglo-American Alliance 1937-41, a Study in Competitive Co-operation*, 1981, pp. 257-60; Sir Alexander Cadogan provided a more personal account of the meeting in his diaries, *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938-1945*, Dicks, D., (ed.), 1971, pp. 395-402; whilst Martin Gilbert provides a more political account in volume six of the massive eight volume definitive Churchill biography, *The Finest Hour, Winston S. Churchill 1939-1941*, 1983, pp. 1150-68. Wm. Roger Louis also provides an in-depth analysis of the consequences of the Atlantic Charter for Britain in his study of Washington's attempts to bring an end to the Empire: *Imperialism at Bay, the United States and the Decolonization of the British Empire 1941-1945*, 1977, see particularly pp. 121-33.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PRELIMINARIES

During the Second World War the British Foreign Office was confronted, apart from the quotidian considerations of wartime diplomacy, with the major problem of post-war security and political development in Western Europe. Clearly the post-World War I settlement had broken down and Germany had re-emerged as a dominant power which had overrun a large part of the continent by late 1941.

Early in the war the Foreign Office had to deal with two initiatives which separately contributed to the establishment of not only a global security organisation, but a Western European group dedicated to the protection of the continent, both predicated on the engagement of the United States. It is the intention of this chapter to outline the process by which the British Foreign Office engaged in both initiatives and secured the participation of the United States in the former.

The Background

During World War Two Foreign Office policy, apart from attention to war diplomacy, concentrated on the need to overcome the isolationist tendency of the United States and to prevent a repeat of the situation after the previous war when Congress had vetoed Woodrow Wilson's universal initiative that would have seen the country assume the status of an international force. Though it should be recognised

that the United States eventually played a significant part in international affairs during the inter-war years, for example over the dilemma of German economic reconstruction via the Dawes Plan, it was not clear that the Americans would once again engage themselves in European security and play a major role in international affairs as British influence and power declined. Although the Foreign Office, and many others in the country did not readily accept Britain's decline, at the same time it was recognised only the United States influence could balance any threats in Europe, and more importantly to the Empire, which Britain alone could not deter.

Consequently, there emerged two distinct strands of British policy crafted to engage the United States in the balance of world forces, not least in Europe, where for centuries Britain had maintained a policy of balance of power whilst concentrating her resources on the security of the Empire. The first strand to emerge was Atlanticist and was simply a means to draw the states on the Atlantic seaboard into a security arrangement to contain a resurgent Germany. Although the original plan called for the involvement of the United States, as it developed the prospect of America remaining neutral was considered by the Foreign Office and the Chiefs of Staff resulting in more fluid analysis. In response to the encouraging signals emanating from Washington the second strand was more internationalist in approach, and envisaged a new world organisation to replace the League of Nations, but with American participation.

Neither initiative could be considered in isolation and as the debate on both continued they became inextricably intertwined resulting in some acrimony between the diplomats and the service departments, whilst the politicians exhibited a marked tendency to ignore post-war planning resulting in some delay to the implementation of

either programme. This was exacerbated by the need to take into account the views of Britain's other major ally, the Soviet Union.

The Bases Plan

Trygve Lie, a Norwegian exiled in Britain, first suggested the outline of a North Atlantic security system involving the United States to the Foreign Office in November 1940. Lie, probably more than aware that Europe alone was unlikely to contain a resurgent Germany after the war, introduced the prospect of an American involvement in European security through the sharing of Atlantic bases.

Lie's plan was not, perhaps, pursued as energetically as it might have been. However, given the fluid state of the war at this point, this reluctance was understandable. The United States remained neutral, and could hardly be considered as a prospective candidate for the defence of Western Europe. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, whose leaders might have perceived the plan as a potential threat, was anchored to Germany through the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of 1939.

The events of 1941, the invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany and the attack on Pearl Harbour, created a more propitious environment for the Foreign Office to pursue Lie's proposal. When the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, visited Moscow in December 1941 the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, assured him that the Soviet Union would have no objections to such an arrangement, providing there was a

reciprocal understanding that the Soviets would be allowed bases in Finland and Romania.¹

Despite this apparently encouraging demarche, the diplomats were unable to secure the approval of either the military or the politicians for the scheme, although they considered it as, 'one of the few ideas for post-war arrangements with both practical value and a possibility of general acceptance'.²

The Chiefs of Staff, when approached by the Foreign Office for their views, concluded that the Bases Plan was of little value, as it would add to Britain's security

¹ Avon, Earl, *The Eden Memoirs, the Reckoning*, 1965, pp. 289-90. It could be argued that this first trade off between British and Soviet interests set the pattern for future demands by Stalin for Russia's own security space in Eastern Europe which was to cause so much debate within the Foreign Office as the war drew to a close. Indeed, in his memoirs Eden made clear his own concerns as to Stalin's intentions to create 'the most tangible physical guarantees for Russia's future security', despite the British hopes that the future discussion of frontiers should be approached along the lines of the Atlantic Charter. The Charter, apart from sparking a significant response by the Foreign Office (see below), was somewhat reluctantly accepted by Churchill at the August 1941 Placentia Bay meeting with Roosevelt, essentially recognised the right of all nations to self-determination and independence. However, it was the ramifications for the British Empire which concerned the Prime Minister more than anything else and in a minute to Leo Amery, Secretary of State for India, he suggested that it was intended 'that the natives of Nigeria or of East Africa could by a majority vote choose the form of Government under which they live, or the Arabs by such a vote expel the Jews from Palestine.'

A year after the signing of the Atlantic Charter Roosevelt proposed an anniversary message to celebrate the Charter; Churchill, writing from Cairo, revealed his concerns to the President:

We considered the wording of that famous document line by line together and I should not be able, without mature consideration, to give it wider interpretation than was agreed between us at the time. Its proposed application to Asia and Africa requires much thought. Grave embarrassment would be caused to the defence of India at the present time by such a statement... Here in the Middle East the Arabs might claim by majority they could expel the Jews from Palestine, or at any rate forbid all further immigration.

Gilbert, M., *Finest Hour, Winston S. Churchill, 1939-1941*, pp. 1162-4.

² Lewis, J., *Changing Direction, British Military Planning for Post-War Strategic Defence, 1942-1947*, 1988, p. 2, quoting from FO371/32832N463/463/30, undated memorandum January 1942. Lewis offers the best analysis of the diplomatic/military debate on the putative Western Bloc arrangement that emerged from Trygve Lie's initial proposals, throughout this dissertation his work will be referred to.

burden without the guarantee of American participation.³ At the same time the politicians were less than enamoured of Lie's proposal.

As early as February 1942 Eden warned his officials: 'Churchill and Attlee [the deputy Prime Minister], had deprecated the general idea of post-war bases in Cabinet'. And, despite Stalin's assurances of 1941, he was still concerned about the Soviet reaction to the initiative suggesting it would be 'wiser to leave this task until we see our Russian way a little clearer.'⁴ Indeed, the situation in the Soviet Union was still perilous. Although the Red Army had repulsed the German threat to Moscow in December 1941, what was to stop Stalin reaching an agreement with Berlin to save as much of the country as possible, a threat which was a major concern to the western allies through out the remaining years of the war.

As for the United States, the American attorney, John Foster Dulles, on an independent fact finding mission to London, warned Eden that Washington was unlikely to endorse a regional agreement in Western Europe whereby 'the smaller states...would become satellites of Great Britain', and the United States would not 'enter into such a combination.'⁵

³ CAB84/44 JP(42)354, 4/4/42, Lewis, p. 7. The Foreign Office were also disappointed that the Future (Operational) Planning Section, deputed to consider the Bases Plan by the C.O.S., did not include the Soviet Union as well as Germany in their considerations as to future threats to Western Europe. John Somers Cocks of the Foreign Office noted: 'It would be bold prophet who would predict that the present Anglo-Soviet alliance will survive indefinitely...we cannot foretell whether Russia might not at some time in the future decide that Narvik and the Swedish iron mines were an essential part of her *lebensraum*.' FO371/32832 N1150/463/30, Somers Cocks minute 7/4/42, Lewis, p. 8.

Somers Cocks's observation serves as a reminder as to how fluid Foreign Office views were at this stage in the war. Two years later the diplomats strenuously objected when the Post-Hostilities Planning Staff, a successor to the F.O.P.S., included the Soviet Union as future threat when analysing the Western Bloc proposals. (See below.)

⁴ FO371/32832 N518/463/30, Eden minute 17/2/42, Lewis p. 6.

⁵ Avon, p. 341. Dulles, whilst not a member of the American administration, was clearly influential and played a major part in drawing up the United Nations Charter at the Dumbarton Oaks deliberations in 1944. His hero was Woodrow Wilson and he had accompanied the President to the Versailles peace

It is apparent at this time that the Foreign Secretary was less than enamoured with American involvement in Europe. Eden, in a minute written after his meeting with Dulles, expressed his doubts about 'this new project' [the Bases Plan], whilst perhaps endorsing the view of others within the Foreign Office, that though 'American views are of interest... ours are even more important where Europe is concerned', and that the United States knew 'very little of Europe and it would be unfortunate for the future of the world if U.S. uninstructed views were to decide the future of the European continent.'⁶ This patronising attitude would, to a great extent, colour all subsequent discussion with respect to American involvement in Europe.

The Foreign Secretary's pessimism with respect to the Bases Plan may also have been influenced by the Prime Minister's own determination to avoid a continental commitment and pursue a policy of closer ties with the United States. Churchill could see little advantage in tying Britain to Western Europe, either politically or militarily, given that the continent was going to be economically devastated after the war and would hardly be in a position, for a number of years, to contribute significantly to its defence. At the same time, like some of the diplomats, he was concerned that the

negotiations. He had been disappointed that the Senate failed to ratify US involvement in the League of Nations, and consequently was determined after World War II the US, along with the allies, should form a new international organisation. The author is indebted to: Moseley, L., *Dulles: A Biography of Eleanor, Allen, and John Foster Dulles and Their Family Network*, 1978, for this biographical information.

Eden in his memoirs indicates that he was only 'told of' Dulles's views, but Moseley suggests there was a meeting between the two, and this is confirmed in the diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, at the time Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, who referred to a meeting in Eden's flat at the FO on 13 July 1942. Cadogan was less than impressed, and described the attorney as 'the woolliest type of pontificating American'. Cadogan, Sir A., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945*, ed. Dilks, D., 1971, p. 462.

⁶ Avon, p. 341.

emergence of a Western European defence pact would encourage the Americans, persuaded by a show of independence, to retreat into isolationism once again.

Perhaps, because of the Prime Minister's misgivings, Eden insisted in gaining political support before he approached the United States administration for their views, as suggested by his staff. Indeed in the autumn of 1942 the War Cabinet had already considered the broader approach encompassed in the Foreign Office's Four Power Plan (see below), and concluded that the Americans should not be approached about the Bases Plan until certain conclusions had been reached 'as to the broader lines' on which international security would be re-established after the war.⁷

Because of this political setback further discussion of any trans-Atlantic security arrangement was delayed for two years whilst the broader issue of an international approach took precedence, although, within the context of that debate, a regional option was not ruled out

It was indeed Gladwyn Jebb's Four Power Plan that perhaps offered the most likely solution to the dilemma of how to engage the United States, not only in Europe, but also in the post-war international settlement, and was significantly influenced by ideas already emanating from Washington.

The Four Power Plan

Churchill and the Foreign Office were dismayed after the Placentia Bay meeting in August 1941, where Roosevelt had sprung the Atlantic Charter on the unsuspecting

⁷ CAB65/28 WM(42)149th, councils(3), 3/11/42.

British delegation. Article III of the charter unequivocally respected the ‘right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live’, and sovereignty and self-government would be restored ‘to those who have forcibly been deprived of them.’⁸ On his return to London, Churchill attempted to allay fears that this struck at the heart of the Empire suggesting it applied only to the subjugated nations of Europe. However, it was a clear sign of the American administration’s detestation of colonialism and their determination to rid the world of what they perceived to be a pernicious system. (See Introduction.)

Consequent Foreign Office reaction reflected the dismay of the diplomats to this initiative. In the words of Charles Peake, publicity aid to the British ambassador in Washington, Lord Halifax, ‘what he [Roosevelt] is out to do is put the U.S.A. definitely on top, and see that she stays there.’⁹ Peake addressed his concerns to Oliver Harvey, Eden’s private secretary, who advised the Foreign Secretary that if Britain did not have a post-war plan ready, ‘Roosevelt would produce one of his own out of his pocket like the Atlantic Charter.’¹⁰

Galvanised by these fears the Foreign Office charged Gladwyn Jebb, as head of the newly created Economic and Reconstruction Department, to address this issue. Jebb’s ensuing paper was essentially a ‘Stocktaking in 1942’ of the post-war options available to Britain.¹¹ Although it suggested that Britain’s role in the world would be

⁸ Cadogan, p. 400.

⁹ Reynolds, D., *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-41: A Study in Comparative Cooperation*, 1981, p.260, quoting a letter to Oliver Harvey from Charles Peake dated 1/7/41, Oliver Harvey papers, British Library, Add. Mss. 56402.

¹⁰ Reynolds, p.260, quoting from Oliver Harvey’s diaries, 6/10/41, vol. 56398, British Library.

¹¹ In his memoirs Gladwyn Jebb observed he was pleasantly surprised to find that on his return from the San Francisco conference in the summer of 1945, that ‘...a more powerful intelligence than mine had been concentrating on long-term policy.’ He was relieved to find that Orme Sargent, Deputy Undersecretary at the Foreign Office, had reached similar conclusions in “Stocktaking After VE Day”,

diminished, 'Relief Machinery, the Political Background', significantly recognised that Britain's aim should be, 'with the cooperation of America', to organise 'some measure of unity in Western Europe', whilst leaving Eastern Europe under Soviet guidance, or even dominance.

The resulting document, after much debate, emerged as The Four Power Plan, which recognised the best option for Britain was the formation of a new world organisation in which both the United States and the Soviet Union would accept 'their world-wide interests and responsibilities' and cooperate 'to prevent any other nation again troubling the peace.'¹²

The fundamental objectives of The Four Power Plan were indeed laudatory but equally doubtful in the current climate of concern about American and Soviet intentions. Both the current Chargé d' Affaires in Washington, Ronald Campbell, and one of his predecessors, Neville Butler, now head of the North American Department, challenged Jebb's sanguine assessment of American commitment to post-war responsibilities. Butler and Campbell were only too aware of the strong, underlying strands of isolationism in American politics and society. Campbell, according to Jebb's memoirs, even suggested that Britain should look to Europe rather than the United States for support.

As regards Soviet cooperation, the head of the Northern Department, Christopher Warner, was equally pessimistic, although he concluded we should do, 'our best to

(see chapter two) 'save that, in the immediate future, we were to "take the offensive" in challenging Communist penetration in as many of the Eastern European countries as possible, and (very properly) counteract any attempt of the USSR to communise and obtain political control over Germany, Italy, Greece and Turkey.' Gladwyn, Lord, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn*, 1972, p. 168.

try'. Twelve months later, perhaps reflecting the fluctuating nature of Foreign Office policy with respect to the Soviet Union, Warner was suggesting that it should be British policy to, 'go all out for Russian cooperation, and the Russian response so far was encouraging...therefore we should take a cooperative and friendly Russia as the present working hypothesis for our plans.'¹³

Although the paper recognised the limits of British post-war power, it assumed an influence on United State's policy that was way beyond the diminishing powers of a state confronting a serious decline, given its major commitment to the war effort and the consequent drain on financial resources. (As suggested above the Foreign Office, like many in Britain at this time, considered the country's economic situation to be only temporary and that when the war was over it would rebound as a major power.) The prospect of a world dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union was considered, '*a dim distant reality*'.¹⁴ (Emphasis added.)

At the time The Four Power Plan was probably the best option open to the British to secure, not only an American involvement in the broader world, but also a commitment to European security. Consequently, the Foreign Secretary circulated a shorter version to the War Cabinet requesting permission to broach the concept to the Americans and Britain's other allies.

Eden's short, pithy paper called for some clarity in British foreign policy whilst recognising it was too early in the war to reach substantive conclusions. At the same

¹² Gladwyn, pp. 109-118.

¹³ FO371/35407 U2937/516/70, record of Military Sub-Committee meeting with the Foreign Office, 23/6/43. Lewis, p. 42.

¹⁴ Gladwyn, pp. 116-18.

time it urged that the Cabinet, 'should take a bearing', for if Britain did not there was a danger the forces of suspicion and isolation apparent in Russia, America and Britain could influence the principal characters involved in the struggle. Accordingly, the Foreign Secretary asked his colleagues to approve the 'general lines of policy' that were sketched in the paper.

It is clear that Eden's paper was, in no small measure, a call for the Cabinet to recognise, and endorse, the Foreign Office's urgent desire for a an immediate British response to counter the ideas emanating from across the Atlantic which might not take into account British interests. In this respect the Foreign Secretary recommended an approach to the Americans before their ideas 'crystallised, as they may, if we disinterest ourselves entirely from them, into forms most objectionable to us.'¹⁵

The paper was discussed by the War Cabinet on 27 November 1942, along with one presented by Sir Stafford Cripps, the Lord Privy Seal, and, although there was no immediate decision, despite Eden's warning that there was little time to waste, it was agreed that he should combine the two documents for later consideration.¹⁶

Subsequently, the Foreign Secretary submitted a broader paper, including Cripps's proposals, now entitled The United Nations Plan, for Cabinet perusal on January 16

¹⁵ CAB66 WP(42) 516, The "Four Power Plan", a paper presented by the Foreign Secretary to the War Cabinet, 8/11/42.

¹⁶ Cripps was just as concerned as the Foreign Secretary, and the diplomats, that the United States was intent on imposing its own views on the post-war settlement. He observed in his memorandum, 'The American century propaganda and all the subtle economic imperialism of the Republicans is liable to strengthen this impression unless we are ready with ideas and prepared to lead with them.' Unlike the Foreign Office, who were aware of the American objections to regionalism, the Lord Privy Seal proposed, recognising the pre-eminent threat to European security posed by Germany, a Council of Europe to counter the 'political, economic and social issues...which were likely to disturb the peace of Europe'. Cripps suggested the European example should be replicated throughout the world with

1943. It was a comprehensive appraisal of the post-war situation given the imponderable nature of the likely outcomes, but which offered the most hopeful outcome to the conflicting strains on world peace.

Despite Gladwyn Jebb's misgivings, expressed in his memoirs, with respect to Cripps's intervention, The United Nations Plan fundamentally reflected his revised paper. Whilst recognising Britain's continuing status as a world power, it made clear that the country could not continue to 'preserve the freedom of Europe' unaided.

The United Nations concept would not, 'provide the necessary cohesion and stability unless the Great Powers are prepared to accept the responsibilities of leadership *within* the United Nations.' (Emphasis in the original.) Moreover, the leadership of the United Nations would have 'to come from three, at least, of the Great Powers - the British Commonwealth, the United States, and Russia.' China would only be considered for inclusion at the instance of the United States later.

Pre-eminently, the document recognised the central problem of European security in any future settlement. Europe, as the 'cradle, and until recently the home, of civilisation which as now spread to almost every corner of the globe', had however been the 'source of most of the worst conflicts in modern history.'

Along with most considerations of the post-war settlement, the Foreign Secretary's paper identified Germany as the major source of future conflict in Europe. Given the central position of Germany, the large population, and the 'highly developed

similar councils in the Americas, the Far East, the British Commonwealth and the Soviet Union. CAB W.P. (42) 532, memorandum by Lord Privy Seal, 19/11/42.

industries', the basis of 'her military power', it was evident that the 'ultimate safety of Europe' would depend on the economic and military 'disarmament of Germany' which would only be achieved by a three power occupation. (In the interests of international cooperation it was clearly not expedient to include the Soviet Union as a major problem in the security of Europe, as Jebb had discussed in his final document. Indeed, he even concluded, as had the military, that if the Soviet Union went its own way and posed a threat in Europe and the Near East, then Britain would have to consider collaboration with Germany.)¹⁷

The Foreign Secretary's paper concluded: only something like the proposed plan could exclude the possibility that 'the course of history' would 'repeat itself' with Germany once more attempting to resume 'the struggle for world hegemony'. Eden urged that if the Cabinet believed that the United Nations Plan offered 'the best hope for the future', they should make every 'possible effort to get it generally agreed without delay.'¹⁸

Despite Eden's plea for urgency, the War Cabinet do not appear to have discussed his paper before his visit to the United States in March 1943. It was this visit that did more than anything else to catalyse the process; indeed, Gladwyn Jebb who accompanied the Foreign Secretary, was more than impressed with the ease both

¹⁷ Gladwyn, p. 117.

¹⁸ The full version of The United Nations Plan appears in: Woodward, Sir L. and Lambert, M. A., (eds.), *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War*, vol. V, pp. 14-18. Significantly, it does not appear that the Prime Minister raised any objections to the proposals despite his opposition to The Bases Plan and later, his cool reception of the Western Bloc concept (see below). Fraser Harbutt suggests Churchill came to value the United Nations as 'the guarantor of American internationalism.' Harbutt, F. J., *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America, and the Origins of the Cold War*, 1986, p. 69. Churchill was certainly well aware of Roosevelt's commitment to internationalism, and at the end of the day may have recognised that he was swimming against the tide. However, it seems, he was determined to maintain a petulant aversion to discussing such policy domestically.

parties to the discussions assumed that a 'post-war authority' was necessary, and even used the term United Nations freely when referring to it.¹⁹

Subsequently, clearly encouraged by the British initiative, the Americans introduced a draft declaration at the Quebec conference in August stating that the governments of the 'United States, the United Kingdom, the U.S.S.R. and China' stated unequivocally that '...their united action, pledged for the prosecution of the war will be continued for the organisation and maintenance of peace and security.'²⁰ Faced with this demarche Churchill responded, as he often did when caught off-guard by Roosevelt, by insisting that it should be referred back to the War Cabinet. Fortunately, the Cabinet responded, given their apparent reluctance to endorse Eden's initial proposal, with alacrity, accepting the American concept with only minor amendments.

The Foreign Office had apparently, at this stage, secured at least one objective of their long-term policy: the engagement of the U.S. administration in the post-war international scheme. In October 1943 the process took two further steps forward. On October 30 the Foreign Ministers conference in Moscow endorsed the Quebec declaration, and six days later the United States Senate passed a resolution calling for the establishment 'at the earliest practicable date' of a 'general international organisation based on the principle of sovereign equality of all peace-loving States, and open to membership of all such States...for the maintenance of international security.'²¹

¹⁹ Gladwyn, p. 127.

²⁰ Woodward and Lambert, vol. V, pp. 70-1.

²¹ Ibid.

The Western Bloc

Having apparently secured an American commitment to international order, the Foreign Office sought further safeguards for British interests, particularly in Europe. Despite the War Cabinet's advice that Trygve Lie's plan should be secondary in the broader international context, throughout the final years of the war a dialogue existed within the Foreign Office, and between the department and the military, on the future of Western European security arrangements, with or without American involvement. Even if the United States remained committed to the world organisation concept, it was clear to many that Britain would be unable to provide any security guarantee to Western Europe alone given the commitments to imperial defence.

The military were concerned to cover all aspects of the threat to the United Kingdom, whether it should be from Germany or the Soviet Union, or both. The Chiefs of Staff were, however, sceptical of the American commitment to a world organisation and the prospect of a timely assistance to Britain in the event of a future continental threat.²² This was made clear in the draft report delivered by the Post-Hostilities Planning Staff after the Foreign Office had asked for the C.O.S. views, early in the summer of 1944, on the establishment of a post-war Western European Group to include all the states on the Atlantic seaboard.²³

²² Gladwyn Jebb's view expressed in Lewis, p.120.

²³ The Foreign Office at this stage was prepared to recognise the reality of the situation in Europe with respect to the intentions of the Soviet Union. Although the May 1942 Anglo-Soviet Treaty was considered as 'the basis of our whole European policy' and should be reinforced 'by all means in our power', the formation of a Western Group would 'reinforce rather than detract from the Anglo-Soviet Treaty', particularly if the Russians, with or without British approval, 'constructed some similar system in Eastern Europe.'

It was considered that such a group would not only contain Germany, but would offer some 'reinsurance' against the failure of the proposed world organisation. Lewis, p. 111, quoting from CAB80/44 COS(44)113, 23/6/44.

The Post-Hostilities Planning Staff's views were incorporated in the general survey of North Atlantic security. Given the general scepticism of the military toward the proposed post-war settlement, and their natural inclination to consider all threats to British security, it was not surprising that they adopted a much broader approach than the Foreign Office. Although Gladwyn Jebb chaired the P.H.P.S., its final report was far more orientated to military considerations and reflected a more realistic analysis of the future security of Western Europe.

Indeed, at this stage in the war, no one could be certain of the strategic outcome but the North Atlantic survey provided a safe fallback analysis should the proposed world organisation fail. It concluded that the likelihood of the United States remaining neutral could not be ignored, whilst at the same time if the Soviet Union also remained neutral, a Western European Group would be essential to contain Germany. However, should the Soviets prove hostile, without American support it was essential 'to try to augment' such a group 'and in the last resort this might entail coming to terms with our ex-enemies.'²⁴ (As Gladwyn Jebb had suggested in his final version of The Four Power Plan)

Only the Northern Department objected to this apocalyptic conclusion, whilst the North American Department, headed by Neville Butler who had previously expressed his reservations about American commitment (see above), endorsed the P.H.P.S. analysis. Consequently, despite the Northern Department's objections, Gladwyn Jebb, the chairman of the P.H.P.S. and the directors of the C.O.S. Planning Staff signed the North Atlantic survey on 20 July 1944.

²⁴ Lewis, pp. 112-17, quoting from, FO371/40741A U283/748/70 and PHP(44)17(0)(Draft), 7/7/44.

Although at this stage the diplomats had apparently achieved their goal, the C.O.S. remained unconvinced. They were far from confident that the proposed world organisation would come to fruition; in particular they doubted the Soviet commitment, and insisted that the P.H.P.S. rewrite their report, 'taking a more realistic view of the situation with which we shall be confronted in the event of a breakdown of world organisation'.²⁵

The protracted debate about the significance of Soviet hostility and what part a unified, or dismembered, Germany would play in a Western European Security Group continued until October. Needless to say, the Foreign Office were deeply concerned that any overt discussion of both issues might reach Moscow, but it finally agreed, after Eden and his Deputy Under-Secretary, Orme Sargent, met the C.O.S in October that any papers discussing such sensitive policies 'should receive a very restricted circulation.'²⁶

Despite their disagreements both the diplomats and the military were, as Julian Lewis points out, 'at one in favouring the creation of a Western European defensive bloc.'²⁷ It was the politicians who continued to procrastinate.

However, it was the Foreign Secretary who revealed an interest in the formation of a Western European defence group in a letter to the British representative to the French

²⁵ COS(44)248th mtg. (0)(14). Quoted in Lewis, p.119.

²⁶ CAB79/82 COS(44)346th Mtg(0)(13)(Confidential Annex), 24/10/44, quoted in Lewis p. 134. It is almost certain Moscow was aware of the debate as Colonel Arthur Cornwall-Jones, the P.H.P.S. secretary, had been forwarding copies of papers under consideration to the British Joint Mission in Washington via the embassy's contact with the mission, Donald Maclean, subsequently revealed as a Soviet spy. After the agreement this source would have dried-up for Moscow.

government in Algiers, Duff Cooper. Cooper had urged the Foreign Secretary that it was in Britain's interest to foster the formation of a Western European economic union, with its vast colonial resources, to act in concert with the United States to preserve the peace of the world; Eden rebuffed such a concept.

Clearly concerned that a regional grouping might discourage Soviet and American support for the Foreign Office's international initiative, the Foreign Secretary noted that a durable peace in Western Europe depended on the Anglo-Soviet alliance preventing a German revival, 'if possible within the ambit of a World Organisation...', whilst the Americans were suspicious 'of proposals' which tended 'to divide up the world into a series of blocs.' He pointed out that it was only by encouraging the formation of World Organisation:

... are we likely to induce the Americans, *and this means the American Senate*, to agree to accept any European commitments designed to range America, in case of need, against a hostile Germany or against any other breaker of the peace. (Emphasis added)

Eden suggested that Cooper's proposal of an economic union was unlikely to work without a political union, and he doubted if Western Europe was ready for this, but he indicated an interest in a Western European common defence policy.²⁸

During the spring and early summer of 1944 the Foreign Secretary had been under pressure from the Belgian and Dutch Foreign Ministers to consider a Western European defence pact. Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Foreign Secretary in exile, had been at pains to point out, 'how much the countries of Western Europe' wished the

²⁷ Lewis, p.122.

²⁸ Cooper, D., *Old Men Forget*, 1986, pp. 345-47; Avon, pp. 445-46, letter dated 25/7/44.

British to 'state more clearly their views' on Western European integration.²⁹ Consequently, in July 1944 Eden spoke to the Belgian, Dutch and Norwegian Foreign Ministers indicating that Britain was awaiting the results of the Dumbarton Oaks conference before pursuing the concept further.³⁰

Eden told the three Foreign Ministers that at the conference Britain would make it clear that she 'proposed to go ahead with defence talks with the Western European allies and that she considered herself free to do so.'³¹ Subsequently, at the talks the British representative, Sir Alexander Cadogan (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office and from 1946 to 1950 British Representative to the United Nations), ascertained that neither the Americans nor the Soviets objected to such an arrangement.

It was the Prime Minister, obsessed with the trans-Atlantic relationship and convinced that his personal diplomacy with Roosevelt and Stalin would provide the means for a successful post-war peace, who remained the major stumbling block to any meaningful political discussion on the Western Bloc system during the remaining months of the war. To some extent Churchill's scepticism, expressed in a letter to Eden after the latter had approached him on the matter in early November 1944, may have held some validity. He doubted Parliament and the British tax payer would be prepared to provide for a British force, which the Western Bloc arrangement clearly called for, however minimal, and support the severely weakened states of Western Europe who had proved, by their ineffective actions before the war and in 1940, less

²⁹ Woodward, vol. V, p. 182.

³⁰ The Georgetown mansion, Washington D.C., where the representatives of the four powers, China, the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain, met between August 21 and October 7 1944, to discuss the formation of a world organisation.

than reliable allies. Churchill particularly singled out the Belgians and the Dutch in his stinging appraisal. Significantly, the Prime Minister was concerned as to how, ‘these ideas of what is called a “western bloc” got around in Foreign Office and other influential circles.’³²

Of the two Foreign Office initiatives for a post-war settlement, the Western Bloc concept was more likely to fail politically, at least until circumstances and events after 1945 gave it a new impetus. The fears of alienating the Soviet Union were valid but hardly real given that Stalin had indicated to the Foreign Secretary in 1941 that Moscow would have no objections to the original Bases Plan. While this was premised on the *quid pro quo* of a similar arrangement for Russian bases in Finland and Romania, it was almost axiomatic, and certainly understood by London, that the Soviets would require some element of influence in Eastern and South Eastern Europe once the war was over.

The original plan for a Western European security arrangement, made clear to Moscow, was to contain Germany; it was the military who introduced the option that it could also provide a defensive system to contain any Soviet westward expansion. Beyond any information supplied by agents such as Donald Maclean, Moscow would have been aware, given their past concerns about the balance of power on the

³¹ Avon, p. 446.

³² Woodward and Lambert, vol. V, pp. 193-4, letter from Churchill to Eden, 25/11/44. At this time public opinion might have accepted the concept of Western European defence bloc, even with its possible connotations, as a measure against Soviet expansionism. Since the invasion of Russia in June 1941 the British public had been supportive of the Soviet Union, but after the Red Army had failed to aid the Warsaw uprising of August-October 1944, opinion ‘crystallised against the Russians’ who were blamed for the city’s fall. Bell, P.M.H., *John Bull and the Bear: British Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and the Soviet Union 1941-1945*, 1990, quoting from Home Intelligence report 210, 3-10 October 1944, p. 101. (The Home Intelligence service was set up at the onset of war by the Ministry of Information and produced daily reports of events during the war.)

continent, that the British were considering the Soviet Union as a possible hostile force. After all Moscow was carrying out its own analysis of the potential threats to the Soviet Union, particularly the consequence of a large American presence in Central Europe.³³

Although the Roosevelt administration had made its distaste for spheres of influence abundantly clear, by the latter stages of the war the Americans were more relaxed about the prospect. At the Teheran conference in 1943, to gain Stalin's support for the United Nations, Roosevelt implicitly recognised a *de facto* Soviet sphere in Eastern Europe.³⁴ Meanwhile, not only had Cadogan gained both American and Soviet agreement to the Western Bloc at Dumbarton Oaks, the draft Charter of the new World Organisation specifically did not preclude 'the existence of regional arrangements or agencies' provided they were consistent with maintaining the peace.³⁵

With neither of Britain's allies objecting to the plan, it is necessary to look nearer to home for an explanation as to why the Foreign Office was unable to gain political support for the Western European defensive group. The Prime Minister's concern about Parliamentary and public support was probably genuine, but it was never put to the test.

Eden was perhaps only half-hearted in his support given his determined commitment to the United Nations plan. Whilst the Prime Minister further displayed his distaste for

³³ Various post-Cold War studies have confirmed this not least *The Cold War International History Project* in various papers, www.wilsoncenter.org/index, in particular *The Big Three After World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post War Relations with The United States and Great Britain*, Vladimir Pechatnov, Working Paper no. 13, July 1995; and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe in *Stalin's Cold War, Soviet Strategies in Europe, 1943 to 1956*, 1995.

³⁴ Harbutt, p. 58.

any European commitment in early November when, on a visit to liberated Paris, he rebuffed de Gaulle's proposal that Britain and France should act as the core of a Western European union independent of the United States and the Soviet Union.³⁶ To the dismay of the Foreign Office, within weeks the General travelled to Moscow and concluded a bilateral treaty with Stalin.

Given the political will, an earlier implementation of a Western European defensive system with its British commitment to the security of the continent might have had a more significant bearing on the events of the early Cold War. Whatever the economic constraints on British power, even an implied commitment to Western European security on the part of Britain may have contributed to a more stable environment and an amelioration of the diplomatic and political pressure Moscow was more than willing to exert in the uncertain conditions pertaining in the post-war period.

In the circumstances the political failure to respond to the various initiatives for a post-war West European security arrangement, not least those from the smaller nations who expected a lead from Britain, as to be put in the context of the major diplomatic success in patiently, but firmly, obtaining an American commitment to the United Nations. This more than any other initiative, responding as it did to the internationalist ideas emanating from across the Atlantic, set the pattern for the United States engagement in world affairs for the next fifty years and in the context of the events of the late 1940s, an eventual American commitment to Western European security.

³⁵ Dumbarton Oaks, final recommendations, Ch. VIII (C) 1, quoted in Woodward and Lambert, vol. V, p. 192.

³⁶ De Gaulle, General, *War Memoirs: Salvation, 1944-46*, 1959, p. 56.

CHAPTER TWO

STOCKTAKING AFTER VE DAY

By the end of the Second World War British diplomacy had achieved unimaginable objectives since the summer of 1940 when the country and its Empire stood alone against Germany. In large part due to British efforts the world appeared to be approaching a new order with the relationship between Britain and the two Great Powers prescribed by the United Nations Charter, the Anglo-Soviet Treaty and the strengthened trans-Atlantic special relationship. On the other hand the efforts to engage politically and militarily in post-war Europe had reached a hiatus due to the lack of political will.

Unfortunately, the high hopes of continued tripartite co-operation were being undermined by the Red Army's rapid westward advance and Moscow's apparent disregard of the Yalta Declaration of Liberated Europe. Although throughout the war British diplomats and the military had largely concentrated on the threat of resurgent Germany to European security there had emerged an awareness of a possibly hostile Soviet Union. By the summer of 1945 this had translated in to a real concern, but it would be another four years before the concept of any Western European security arrangement formally adopted the view that the only threat to stability on the continent came from the Soviet Union.

In view of the momentous changes wrought by the war, and the uncertain future, it was perhaps not unnatural that the British Foreign Office would wish, in the summer

of 1945, to review the diplomatic future. It was the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, who instigated such an appraisal devolving the responsibility to Sir Orme Sargent, the Deputy Under-Secretary in the department, who in a matter of days prepared a draft memorandum, 'Stocktaking After VE Day', which provoked an intense debate within Whitehall that apparently continued for some weeks.

Although Orme Sargent's memorandum was seminal to British post-war foreign policy it was never apparently endorsed by the politicians in either the caretaker Conservative government or the ensuing Labour administration. Eden observed on the 12 July, the day after the initial draft was printed, 'I think this is an excellent paper and the Annexes are all valuable. I should like the PM to see them and I am tempted to let Cabinet have a look also';¹ however, there does not appear to be any reference to 'Stocktaking' in the Cabinet papers of this period.² But there is ample evidence that Sargent's paper was still under consideration, and open to amendment, as late as 29 July 1945 three days after the Labour Government assumed office. On that date Sir Ronald Campbell, recently returned from a three year stint in the Washington Embassy, issued a dire warning to the Deputy Under-Secretary about his optimistic suggestions in the paper as to Anglo-American co-operation:

"Discrimination", "exclusiveness", "monopoly", "imperialist economy"-all these words will be trotted out against us and gain spontaneous and often unthinking

¹ FO371/50912/5471, 12/7/45.

² The only indirect evidence that Sargent's paper may have been seen by either the caretaker Cabinet, or even possibly by the new Labour Cabinet, appears in assessment of future relations with the Commonwealth in the light of developments during the war. The author cannot be identified from the indecipherable initials at the end of the memorandum but commences the analysis by suggesting that the recent paper by Orme Sargent, 'on the fundamental premises of British Foreign Policy in the immediate post-war years has recently been circulated to the Cabinet.' Although the memorandum is undated, it was certainly written after the conference at Potsdam as the author notes the lack of consultation with the two Pacific dominions, Australia and New Zealand, over the publication of the Big Three ultimatum to Japan during the conference. FO371/ 50912/5471, undated.

response from the U.S. public. *Is this point worthy of mention in your "Stocktaking After VE Day"? It is important in estimating the prospects of Anglo-American co-operation...*³ (Emphasis added.)

Sargent largely ignored Campbell's warning, as he did another prescient minute written as late as September 1945 commenting on his equally enthusiastic incorporation of the Commonwealth in his proposed middle force. The minute, probably from the Dominions Office, warned of new spirit of independence in the Commonwealth that militated against taking the Dominions for granted in any alliance, particularly one directed against the Soviet Union.⁴

Given this evidence it would appear that the advent of the new Labour Government had not precluded further discussion of Sargent's paper; from this it is not hard to conceive that the new Foreign Secretary, if not fully cognisant of the contents of the document, was at least aware of the discussion process. Although Robin Edmonds, himself a former diplomat, has suggested that Whitehall convention forbade incoming governments from seeing memoranda prepared for the previous administration,⁵ the similarities between Sargent's proposals and much of the policy subsequently adopted by Ernest Bevin in the early years of office suggests, at the very least, some awareness of 'Stocktaking After VE Day', even if it was only by the general discussion of policy by his aides.

This is not to suggest, as some have done, that Bevin was persuaded and swayed by his officials to follow a Foreign Office line; he was too strong a character and his background in the trade union movement had equipped him to fight his own battles,

³ Sir Ronald Campbell to Sir Orme Sargent, 29/7/45, *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, srs. I, vol. I, 1984, pp. 1189-90. Hereafter *DBPO*.

⁴ B. Newton, FO371/50912/5471, 24/9/45.

⁵ Edmonds, R., *Setting the Mould: the United States and Britain 1945-1950*, 1986, ff p. 29.

as well as those of others, to allow officials to take him for granted. Indeed, Bevin's experience of combating communist infiltration in the trade unions might have predisposed him to adopt the anti-Soviet line suggested by Orme Sargent much earlier than he did; instead he pursued a policy of co-operation until the failure of the London meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in December 1947. With regard to the concept of Western Bloc, as early as 1937 Bevin had aspired to a United States of Europe, and the pooling of the resources of the major colonial powers, so as to rid Europe of the old balance of power rivalry and create greater economic stability,⁶ but as Foreign Secretary he refused to embrace Sargent's almost identical scheme until the final breakdown of co-operation with the Soviet Union.

Despite failing, apparently, to gain consideration in Cabinet, 'Stocktaking After VE Day' is an important document providing as it does a valuable insight in to the debate existing within the Foreign Office as Britain entered a new era in international relations. The introduction of two new major players who had hitherto rarely acted according to their relative economic and political strengths, combined with a Europe ravaged by war and uncertain of its future as an independent force, presented the Foreign Office with an enormous task to retain Britain's influence.

Interestingly, despite its ramifications, the memorandum has not perhaps received the attention it merits in other secondary works. Victor Rothwell and John Saville

⁶ Bullock, A., *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, vol. 1, *Trade Union Leader 1881-1940*, 1960, pp.622-23; speech to Labour Party Conference Bournemouth, Labour Party Conference Report, 1937, p.207; *The Record*, January 1938, p. 154.

appear to have devoted more space than any other authors to the subject,⁷ and, rightly, the latter observed that:

Orme Sargent stated two of the three principal strands of policy inherited by the Labour Government. These were the recognition of the Soviet Union as the main hostile force in the world and the clear understanding of the crucial importance of the United States, and its material strength.⁸

It is the intention of this chapter to amend the deficit and provide an in-depth analysis of Sargent's findings, whilst revealing the debate that occurred both within the Foreign Office and in Whitehall resulting in a final, amended memorandum possibly weeks, if not months, after the original draft in early July 1945. A process paralleled by the discussions following Gladwyn Jebb's first 'Stocktaking', the Four Power Plan, in 1942. Both cases appear to confirm that British foreign policy-making is much, as William Wallace suggests, an incremental, discursive process influenced by a number of individuals. (See Introduction.)

The over-arching thesis of Sargent's memorandum was the need for Britain to adopt radical, and far-reaching policies in the new geo-strategic reality of the post-war era in which it was already apparent:

...in the minds of our big partners, especially in that of the United States, there is a feeling that Great Britain is now a secondary Power and can be treated as such, and that in the long run all will be well if they-the United States and the Soviet Union-as the two supreme World Powers of the future, understand one another. *It is this misconception which it must be our policy to combat.*⁹ (Emphasis added.)

⁷ Rothwell, V., *Britain and the Cold War 1941-1947*, pp. 144-8, and Saville, J., *The Politics of Continuity, British Foreign Policy and the Labour Government 1945-1946*, pp. 31-2.

⁸ Saville added that the third component 'was the central importance of the Empire' and the preservation of the lines of communication through the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

⁹ 'Stocktaking After VE Day', FO371/50912/5471, 11/7/45. Hereafter 'Stocktaking'.

It is in this context, retaining Britain's status and independence as a Great Power that, 'Stocktaking' reveals the complexity of the situation facing Britain at this time given the constraints imposed by both domestic economic reality and the existing international situation. Throughout the document however there remains the continuing concern to balance British political independence with the need for American support to ensure the security of Britain and of Western Europe, now even more essential given the need for a massive post-war reconstruction.

Sargent's analysis of the immediate post-war situation was marked by two egregious departures from previous Foreign Office policy: the first was the total disregard for Gladwyn Jebb's efforts to internationalise the peace settlement through the United Nations, and the second was the acceptance of the C.O.S. concerns with respect to the threat from the Soviet Union.

Although Sargent, early in the document, talked generally of Great Power co-operation:

...it suits us that the principle of co-operation between the three Great Powers should be especially accepted as the basis on which problems arising out of the war should be handled and decided. Such a co-operative system will, it is hoped, give us a position in the world which we might otherwise find it increasingly difficult to assert and maintain were the other two Great Powers to act independently...¹⁰

there was no mention of the United Nations as an institution to cement the process.

This was hardly strange given his apparent detestation of international institutions,¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ When Sargent replaced Sir Alexander Cadogan in the summer of 1946 as Permanent Under-Secretary, Professor Charles Webster, an academic closely associated with the Foreign Office, noted he represented 'the F.O. of say 1910...he laughs at the United Nations as he did the League of Nations, and the Southern and Northern Departments which with Reconstruction are the kernel of the F.O. take

but given the previous Foreign Office, and government, endorsement of Gladwyn Jebb's Four Power Plan it was nonetheless perverse and may have reflected a general mood of cynicism which had set in within Whitehall at the end of the war.

A despondent Gladwyn Jebb seems to confirm this in a memorandum written shortly after his return from the San Francisco conference. Concerned that an opportunity was apparently being squandered which indisputably secured 'our major foreign policy objectives', including the probability that the United States, 'will shortly be committed to intervene if trouble breaks out anywhere in the world', and the prospect that the Soviet Union was 'bound by the most solemn obligations, which it must surely hesitate to repudiate', Jebb railed at the lack of positive thinking which jeopardised the chance for Britain to assume a leading role. In contrast he noted the positive attitude he had encountered in the United States:

There is no question of the interest that Americans take in the whole affair, and the general impression created is that they are willing and anxious to assume responsibilities and will not fall by the wayside if the United Nations does not work out in quite the way which is now expected.

Here, on the other hand, if anybody can be induced to talk about the subject at all, it is in a mood of disillusionment, not unmixed with cynicism. No one seems to think that it greatly matters whether there is a World Organisation or not, and most people fall back on the stock argument that, if constituted on the lines now proposed, it will simply be a great Power Alliance which will last just as long as the interests of the Great Powers do not clash.¹²

If, however, Jebb's pessimism was justified, and there was a mood of cynicism toward the United Nations within the foreign service, it was bound to run up against

their lead from him. He may not last long but he may do infinite harm in that time.' Smith, R., "Ernest Bevin, British Officials and British Soviet Policy, 1945-47", in Deighton, A., (ed.), *Britain and the First Cold War*, 1990, p. 39; quoting from Charles Webster Diary, The British Library of Political and Economic Science, entry 3/2/46.

¹² *DBPO*, srs.I, vol. I, p. 893, Jebb memorandum 25/7/45.

political reality for both the new Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary were committed internationalists. Both were determined to give the new organisation a chance to work, and it was only when the international situation deteriorated that they were prepared to adopt alternative policies to secure British interests.

Given its full title 'Stocktaking After Victory in Europe Day', the paper was understandably Eurocentric, Sargent admitting toward the end that it was too early to analyse the situation in the Far East, but strangely, given the concerns about the Mediterranean and the Middle East in some quarters, this particularly important strategic area was perhaps not given the depth of analysis it demanded.

Initially, Sargent identified the three major problems confronting Britain in Europe:

- (a) the military occupation by Soviet troops of a large part of Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Government's future policy generally;
- (b) the economic rehabilitation of Europe so as to prevent a general economic collapse;
- (c) the task of administering Germany and deciding on her future institutions in agreement with the Soviet, United States and French Governments.¹³

However, the Deputy Under-Secretary was under no illusions as to the limited role Britain would have in asserting any influence over the outcome of these three fundamental concerns in the prevailing international situation, compared to that

¹³ 'Stocktaking'.

after World War One. Whereas after 1918 when Britain and France ‘shared and disputed, and eventually lost, control of Europe, this time the control is to a large degree in the hands of the Soviet Union and the United States, and neither of them would consider Britain’s interest if it conflicted with theirs...unless we assert ourselves.’¹⁴ Painful as it must have been, Sargent was forced to admit that in the ‘minds of our big partners’, especially in the United States, ‘there is a feeling that Great Britain is now a secondary power and can be treated as such.’ In the ‘long run’ the danger was that the two ‘supreme powers’ would see it in their interest ‘to understand one another.’¹⁵

Sargent’s solution to this apparent lack of British influence was little more than traditional British balance of power politics practised so successfully in the past. But whereas the orthodox response usually demanded a regional coalition, or alliance, to balance threats from either Germany, France or Russia, now there was

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. The sceptical Ronald Campbell, who in a record of a conversation with Alexander Halpern, noted the contemporary feeling in the United States with regard to Great Britain, once more provided evidence supporting Sargent’s view. (Halpern had worked for the head of British foreign intelligence in America, Sir William Stephenson, *aka* Intrepid, during the war, and had left the United States about week before Orme Sargent commenced his *tour de force* of British prospects.)

Campbell noted ‘...that an assumption now prevailed, even amongst some of our best friends, whether in the Administration or private individuals, that Great Britain was now *definitely a second rate power*.’ (Emphasis added.) Alarming, in the context of Sargent’s subsequent objective of involving the Commonwealth and Western Europe in a countervailing force to the power of the United States and the Soviet Union, ‘There was a feeling that political relations between members of the Commonwealth were not strengthening the United Kingdom...’ Likewise:

The Americans also were beginning to believe that the position of the United Kingdom in Europe was weakening; we were losing friends rather than increasing their number. On this point Mr. Halpern referred to European and especially Belgian criticism which was to the effect that we were not assuming as we should the leadership of Western Europe, and that our policy was a hand-to-mouth opportunist one without central direction or object.’

Once more Campbell was at pains to note the consequences of this conversation with respect to ‘Stocktaking After VE Day’, and advised: ‘Sir Orme Sargent might find it worthwhile to spare him [Halpern] half an hour some time.’ *DBPO*, Srs. I, vol. I, pp. 180-181, *Record by Sir R. Campbell of conversation with Mr. Halpern*, AN 2245/22/45, 11/7/45. Information about the activities of Halpern and Stephenson can be found in: Mahl, T. E., *Desperate Deception: British Covert Operations in the United States, 1939-44*, pp. 9-45.

an extra-European element which required a broader approach to counter it: the new political, economic and military power of the United States.

The solution was not novel, but an adaptation of the Western Bloc concept which had featured in policy discussions since Trygve Lie's initiative early in the war. However, whereas it had generally been seen as an antidote to German resurgence Sargent now envisaged, not only a broader alliance, but an altogether different role. Recognising the numerical, economic, diplomatic and military weakness of Britain relative to the United States and the Soviet Union, Sargent proposed to restore the balance by enrolling 'France and the lesser Western European Powers', and the Commonwealth, as collaborators 'in this tripartite system.'¹⁶

From the European point of view such an alliance was not entirely unimaginable given the Dutch and Belgian initiatives in 1944 (see Chapter One, *ff* 37) despite Campbell's pessimism. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister had undermined the likelihood of French participation by rejecting de Gaulle's proposal for an Anglo-French led Western Bloc on a visit to liberated Paris in early November 1944. Churchill had vigorously rebuffed the French leader's proposal fearing such an arrangement would jeopardise the trans-Atlantic relationship.¹⁷ By late November 1944 Eden, who had apparently been converted to the concept of a Western European security arrangement, warned, in a minute to Churchill, that it would be

¹⁶ 'Stocktaking'.

¹⁷ In his Second World War memoirs, *The Second World War*, vol. VI, *Triumph and Tragedy*, 1966, Churchill did not mention De Gaulle's overtures; but in his own memoirs, *War Memoirs: Salvation, 1944-1946*, 1960, pp. 55-57, the French leader describes his plea to the British Prime Minister for a Western Bloc to balance the two other powers, America and the Soviet Union. De Gaulle was of course intent, as his description of the conversation with Churchill in November 1944 revealed, on restraining

necessary to act soon to secure an arrangement which provided ‘defence in depth’ for Britain as the Western allies, particularly France, might conclude that without a British commitment, ‘their only hope’ lay ‘in making defence arrangements, not with us, but with Russia.’¹⁸ In early December de Gaulle and Stalin signed the Franco-Soviet pact recognising that both countries would, ‘take in common all measures designed to oppose a new German threat.’¹⁹ Fortunately, the other states of Western Europe did not follow de Gaulle’s example and the way was still open to the conclusion of a Western European defence arrangement, although only after Ernest Bevin had exhausted all other means to continue co-operation with Moscow, would the concept be considered, but without Commonwealth support.²⁰

Indeed, Commonwealth support was never very likely; Jebb had observed in his draft Four Power Plan in 1942 that the Commonwealth was unlikely to survive the war, and only the Prime Minister of South Africa, General Smuts, was supportive

the power of the United States and breaking-up the Anglo-Saxon relationship to the advantage of France. It is, however, interesting that his views were so in tune with Orme Sargent’s.

¹⁸ *DBPO*, srs. I, vol. I, pp. 246-248, minute from Mr. Eden to Mr. Churchill, no. PM/44/732, 29/11/44.

¹⁹ De Gaulle, p. 80.

²⁰ It would appear De Gaulle was not, however, to be the final arbiter with respect to French attitudes to a Western Bloc concept; an optimistic Foreign Office memorandum, dated one day after the official date of ‘Stocktaking After VE Day’, noted the public enthusiasm for an Anglo-French Treaty in both countries, ‘despite General De Gaulle’s antics...’, whilst drawing attention to the support of the Foreign Ministers of Belgium, the Netherlands and Norway for a Western European alliance. The attitude of the French government was described as ‘wobbling on the brink’, as to the foundation of an Franco-British Treaty, but the memorandum stressed the positive attitude of the French Consultative Assembly which had passed a resolution ‘that the French Government “should increase their efforts towards drawing up a Franco-British Treaty which, with the Franco-Soviet Treaty would be one of the European foundations for the building of world peace.”’ Even before the San Francisco Conference the Foreign Office, ‘received a rather excited proposal from the Quai d’Orsay’ whereby the Secretary General of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, M. Chauvel, ‘would come to London immediately to conclude a short’ Anglo-French Treaty. Although at the time the Foreign Office welcomed the French initiative it was decided that there was insufficient time before the meeting in San Francisco to conclude such an agreement, and in any case, as the memorandum observed, the visit did not take place, it appeared that in the event M. Bidault [the French Foreign Secretary] and his officials had outrun General De Gaulle. *DBPO*, srs. I, vol. I, *Brief for the United Kingdom Delegation to the Conference at Potsdam*, 12/7/45, pp. 234-251.

of a Western European Bloc although he ruled out any Dominion contribution.²¹

Two minutes written in response to Sargent's memorandum warned not to take Commonwealth support for granted.

The first, by an anonymous source, noted it had been in the Commonwealth's own interest to pool their resources and accept British leadership during the war, but highlighted an emerging independent line apparent at the San Francisco Conference, particularly by Australia and New Zealand:

The anxiety of the Dominion delegations was to secure the support of all the British Commonwealth delegations. And particularly of the United Kingdom...It is likely therefore that the Dominions will express their views on many international questions, and more fully, than they have done in the past.²²

As the author of the minute observed, at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers meeting in London in 1944, Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister of Canada, had forcefully resisted any idea that Britain should represent the Commonwealth in the United Nations. It was pointed out that the Dominions had always resisted any centralisation of Imperial discourse in the form of an inter-Imperial secretariat which was founded not only on the fear that independence was threatened, but also out of a deep suspicion of the United Kingdom:

The Dominions are jealous of their independence, and have not yet lost that distrust of Whitehall which dates from the days when they were Colonies and the Colonial Office, to a varying degree, their master.²³

²¹ Avon, Lord, *Memoirs, Anthony Eden: The Reckoning*, 1965, p. 446. Apparently as early as 1943 Smuts, in a speech to the United Kingdom Branch of the Empire Parliamentary Association, had postulated a Western Bloc of nations that had caused *The Times* to take up the idea. Ibid., *DBPO*.

²² Undated minute attached to 'Stocktaking', by unidentified official, probably, judging from the contents, an official at the Dominions Office.

²³ Ibid.

The importance of Dominion independence was echoed by B. Newton, possibly writing from the Commonwealth Office, in a second minute which noted that the Dominions would be ‘suspicious of attempts *to use them* to bolster up the position of the United Kingdom’ (emphasis added), whilst fearing any suggestion of “ganging up” in the new era of international unity promised by the United Nations, against the Soviet Union. In a clear reference to the domination of the Americans in the Pacific theatre, and the proximity of Canada to the United States, Newton observed that the Domions, whilst ‘having nothing to fear from the United Kingdom’ recognised that:

They are both militarily and economically dependent on the U.S.A. They are therefore determined never to put themselves in position which might involve hostility or strong opposition to the U.S.A.²⁴

Despite these warnings Orme Sargent was not prepared to alter his view; evident modifications to the original draft document in the Public Record Office indicate that he took on board a number of criticisms and suggestions from a broad spectrum of sources in the final paper, but ignored any suggestion that his proposals might alienate the sensitivities of the Commonwealth. Once more the Deputy Under-Secretary was revealing his “old” Foreign Office thinking, the world viewed through the prism of the Empire and its immutable structure. Although there was much subsequent debate as to utility of the colonies as a means to retain British independence with economic support, Dominion involvement in the Western Bloc never materialised and was never really credible.²⁵

Victor Rothwell has observed in his extremely readable, and thoroughly researched, analysis of British diplomacy during World War II and the early years of the Cold

²⁴ ‘Stocktaking’, minute by B. Newton, 24/9/45.

War, 'By the time he had finished it was difficult to see what was left of Sargent's starting point of three power co-operation'.²⁶ With so much of 'Stocktaking After VE Day' taken up with analysis of the Soviet threat, and the need to counter it with American help, it is not too difficult to agree with him given the Under-Secretary's determination to confront Stalin's threat to the stability and security of Europe. But whereas the Post Hostilities Planning Staff had considered a military response to counter Soviet expansionism, Sargent was still prepared to pursue diplomacy to challenge Soviet influence in Eastern and South Eastern Europe whilst holding in check any further encroachment into Western Europe.

Apparently blind to the reality of the situation where the Red Army occupied much of Eastern Europe, Sargent insisted that it would be possible:

...to perform the double task of holding the Soviet Government in check in Europe and, at the same time, amicably and fruitfully co-operating with the Soviet and United States Governments in the resettlement of Europe if once the United States Administration realise both the political and economic implications of the European situation.²⁷

Although he did not expand on how this somewhat doubtful task would be undertaken given the circumstances, other than suggesting that the United States could be induced to resist Soviet penetration if Britain upheld the principles of liberalism in Europe, rather than displaying any selfish desire to remain a Great Power. (See Below.)

Gladwyn Jebb, writing five days before his despondent memorandum quoted above, (see p.38), could see little sense in attempting to counter Soviet influence in Eastern and South Eastern Europe, although he did not disagree with the tone of Sargent's

²⁵ See John Kent, *British Imperial Strategy and the Origins of the Cold War 1944-49*, 1993, for an in depth analysis.

²⁶ Rothwell, V., *Britain and the Cold War 1941-1947*, 1982, p. 147.

conclusions, that it would do no harm to adopt ‘a tough line with the Russians since pretty crude bargains are really the only kind of negotiations which they appreciate and understand’, but, ever the pragmatist, he questioned the necessity, ‘to “keep our foot firmly” in Finland, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia?’ Clearly recognising the inevitability of the situation with the Red Army established firmly in Eastern Europe, Jebb warned that British interference there would only provoke Soviet interference in Western Europe; just what Sargent was attempting to avoid. Returning to his prescient analysis in the earlier version of his Four Power Plan of 1942, Jebb recommended a traditional spheres of influence solution:

It would be simpler, I should have thought, if we are to adopt the crude bargaining technique, for us to say that we do not wish to meddle in Soviet preserves provided they for their part definitely renounce any meddling in what we consider to be our sphere.

Jebb was moreover concerned that Sargent was suggesting a British stand before firm moves had been made to establish the Western Bloc, which would be instrumental in bolstering Britain’s status.²⁸

What is clearly evident from Sargent’s confrontational approach to Moscow is the emergence of a new hard line toward the Soviet Union within the Foreign Office. After the heady days of the Yalta Conference, when the three leaders had signed the Declaration on Liberated Europe guaranteeing democratic governments in all of the liberated countries, the alarm bells had started to ring as the Soviet Union proceeded to establish favourable regimes wherever the Red Army dominated. Since the meeting in

²⁷ ‘Stocktaking’.

²⁸ Minute attached to ‘Stocktaking’, Gladwyn Jebb, 20/7/45. Interestingly, whatever his views expressed in the draft Four Power Plan, Jebb was apparently prepared to foresee a Commonwealth contribution to the Western Bloc scheme, noting it would be necessary to establish ‘some real working arrangement with France and the Low Countries as well as the Dominions.’

the Crimea various diplomats, including Sargent, had written papers which reflected a hardening of attitude within the Foreign Office toward the emerging situation.

Almost immediately after the conference the British ambassador in Moscow, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, was writing in March 1945, 'I fear, however, that much has happened since to trouble the harmonies established at Yalta and to fortify critics, who are inclined to question the value of the meeting.'²⁹ By April, Sargent, who had resisted assiduously any mention of a Soviet threat in the various P.H.P.S. papers, acknowledged there was a, 'sudden truculence' on the part of the Soviet Government, 'a truculence so out of keeping with the willingness to co-operate that they showed at Yalta.' Foreshadowing the events of the next few years Sargent predicted the formation of an Anglo-American, 'anti-Russian and anti-Communist bloc in Europe'; however, this was premised, as in 'Stocktaking', on the failure of Moscow to recognise the right of Britain and the United States to retain some influence in Eastern Europe, rather than as a means to contain the Soviet Union.³⁰

It should be emphasised that in 'Stocktaking' Sargent still foresaw the confrontation as diplomatic rather than military, as it could be assumed that Stalin, recognising the devastation of the Soviet economy and the economic and military power of the United States, would, 'not want and could not afford another war in Europe.'³¹

²⁹ Memorandum from Sir Archibald Clark Kerr to the Foreign Office, 27/3/45, quoted in Ross, G., *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin: British Documents on Anglo Soviet Relations, 1941-45*, 1984, p. 193.

³⁰ Ibid., Sargent minute, 2/4/45.

³¹ 'Stocktaking'.

Although it was the growing confrontation in Central and Eastern Europe that preoccupied Sargent, he did not fail to recognise the significance to British interests of the countries bordering the Mediterranean:

It must be an essential feature of our European policy to maintain close and friendly relations with Italy, Greece and Turkey, so as to secure our strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean...

The influence of Greece and Turkey was of course particularly significant as they fulfilled a twin role in British strategy; both were in a position to contain Soviet expansionism in South Eastern Europe, and Turkey in particular was a bulwark against a move to control the Middle Eastern oil fields, but at the same time the retention of friendly regimes in either country was essential to British free passage via the Suez Canal to the eastern Empire. Indeed it was the British determination to hold on to Greece and Turkey as allies to the west that provoked the first American commitment to Europe after the Foreign Office demarche of February 1947 that resulted in the Truman Doctrine. (See Chapter Three.)

At this point in his memorandum Sargent was close to revealing the true intent of British policy. Despite proposing a Western Bloc to act independently of the two Great Powers, which if Bevin had pursued might have had the adverse outcome of persuading the United States to return to isolationism, Sargent now moved on to discuss how America would be inveigled in to joining the diplomatic campaign against the Soviet Union, showing little regard for tripartite co-operation.

Sargent was only endorsing previous British policy when he suggested that the involvement of the United States was the key to the future of Europe. However, he

was more than aware that it would be less than easy to engage the Americans in the affairs of Europe given the deep suspicion they had of British motives. What Sargent proposed was nothing less than a cynical ploy to exploit the liberal ideals of the United States by demonstrating that Britain was not embarking upon a selfish, power enhancing, challenge to Soviet expansionism, ‘...we must contrive to demonstrate to the American public that our challenge is based on upholding the liberal idea in Europe and not upon selfish apprehensions as to our position as a Great Power.’³²

It is highly unlikely that Washington would have responded to such obvious machinations, indeed, Sargent recognised that the distinguished American journalist Walter Lippmann was not alone in fearing Britain would attempt to, ‘embroil the much less interested United States’ in the historical Anglo-Russian antagonism.³³ Even if such a liberal crusade could have been launched in the already occupied Eastern European states, and Sargent was either incredibly naïve or very stubborn to imagine it could, it may have taken many years to convince the Americans it was nothing less than the cynical ploy it certainly was.

Although Washington was intent on retaining the goodwill and the co-operation of the Soviet Union in the United Nations, in which the Americans had higher expectations than the cynical Orme Sargent, doubts about the sincerity of Stalin’s

³² Ibid. Orme Sargent was hardly a convinced liberal as was evident by his disdain for the League of Nations. Robert Bruce Lockhart revealed the elitist, conservative, nature of Deputy Under-Secretary in his diaries:

Moley interprets democracy in the form of individual liberty, and he sees this is gone. He therefore takes the gloomiest view of the future of this country from which everything that *he likes*-leisure, time for books and pictures, culture, etc.-will be banished. (Emphasis added.) Lockhart, R. B., *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, 1939-1965*, Young, K., (ed.) 1980, p. 380.

³³ ‘Stocktaking’.

commitments to the Yalta ideals were also beginning to surface there. On his way to the San Francisco Conference Vyacheslav Molotov was given a stern lecture by the new President on the need to uphold the Declaration of Liberated Europe. The Soviet Foreign Minister retorted to Truman that he had, 'never been talked to like that' in his life.³⁴

Later in 1945 however, James Byrnes, the new Secretary of State, was to demonstrate the American determination to continue co-operation with the Soviets regardless of the British views, and their own concerns, at the first meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in London. To a great extent Bevin was sidelined in London, and later in the year was not consulted by Byrnes when the latter proposed a tripartite Foreign Ministers meeting in Moscow in an attempt to overcome the disagreements and acrimony which had prevailed in London.³⁵ (See Chapter Three.)

Despite his earlier pessimism as to Britain's status in the emerging world order, Sargent appears to have considered she had still sufficient influence to mould American policy with respect to the Soviet Union. Reflecting on the failure of British policy after World War I, when it had been their intention to build up Germany against French objections, resulting in the latter becoming disillusioned and defeatist, Sargent believed it would be possible to prevent a similar outcome for Britain if the United States tended, 'to act as conciliators between us and Russia (and Germany)', and tried 'to free themselves from what they consider to be British tutelage in European affairs.'

³⁴ Harbutt, F. J. *The Iron Curtain: Churchill, America, and the Origins of the Cold War*, 1986, pp. 81-116, and Truman, H. S., *Year of Decisions: Memoirs by Harry S. Truman*, 1955, pp.91-99.

³⁵ Byrnes's unilateral approach to Molotov suggesting the Moscow meeting so incensed Bevin it appeared at one stage that he would, out of pique, refuse to attend. Only careful diplomacy by Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, ambassador to Moscow, persuaded the Foreign Secretary to accept the American démarche.

Whereas British policy had gradually broken, ‘the spirit of France’, it was important, now, that the Americans could not be allowed to have, ‘the same effect upon us... We must not allow ourselves to get into the same defeatist mood in dealing with post-war Europe.’

With the contempt and cynicism which came from years of diplomatic service to what had been one of the foremost powers in the world, Sargent proposed to counter any such tendency by imposing a British foreign policy on the Americans, ‘We must have a policy of our own and try to persuade the United States to make it *their own*. This ought not to be too difficult.’ (Emphasis in the original.) Should the Americans object to their policy being dictated to them then the British would need, ‘to stand by our own policy’, and the most effective means would be to seek the support and collaboration of the French, ‘and the smaller European countries of Western Europe.’

Sargent apparently expected a free hand for Britain to intervene, ‘in the countries which the Soviet Government’ was ‘intent on controlling’, whilst the, ‘interest and prestige’ of the United States was engaged in ‘solving the economic problems of Europe’. However, once the Americans had been induced to use their economic power in the reconstruction of Europe the Deputy Under-Secretary believed they would find it difficult, ‘to disinterest themselves in the political development of the countries whom they are saving materially.’³⁶

The ramifications for such a policy clearly eluded Sargent; fixated by the need to regain British influence in Eastern Europe he was in danger of alienating the one

power that could play a major part in the reconstruction of Europe. Unable to comprehend Moscow's domination and unwilling to accept a spheres of influence solution, he was also incapable of recognising it was the Americans who were more likely to become disillusioned and disinterested if the British attempted to impose their own policy aims, much as the French had been after World War I.

Sargent gave little attention in 'Stocktaking' to Britain's economic plight and the effect this might have on the ability to project the policies he was outlining. Having lost a quarter of her wealth, £7,300million, and assumed a debt to other countries of £3,555 million,³⁷ it is not unlikely that this may have been the focus of some consideration. In one brief paragraph on the topic Sargent, rightly, noted that, 'In considering how best to co-operate with the United States in world affairs', Britain would have to 'take in to account the whole series of economic and financial questions' which remained to be settled. The issues in question were: the immediate need for an American loan; the ramifications for Britain's, 'financial and commercial policy' of Article 7 of the Mutual Aid Agreement and the repayments for the Lend-Lease aid.

Article 7 of the Mutual Aid Agreement of 1942 was perhaps the most onerous of these issues. Under its terms Britain was required to dismember the Commonwealth preferential system of trade agreed at the Ottawa Conference in 1931. A response to the autarkic trade policies pursued by the rest of the world as a result of the collapse of the world trading system after the financial crisis of 1929, the Commonwealth preferences ensured a supply of cheap raw materials and food that could be paid for in

³⁶ 'Stocktaking'.

sterling rather than dollars, essential after the war when the latter were in short supply. It could be argued that this was another American blow to the cohesion of the Commonwealth and Empire; without the bonds inherent in the trading system it was more than likely that Jebb's pessimistic prediction in 1942 of Commonwealth disintegration would be fulfilled.

Sargent was only too aware that, 'The spirit in which these questions' were handled would be 'reflected in the realm of Anglo-American co-operation throughout the world.' A view endorsed by Edmund Hall-Patch, a Treasury mandarin transferred to the Foreign Office in June 1944, in a memorandum written in August 1945. Essentially the Hall-Patch memorandum confronted, as Sargent had only hinted at, the repercussions for the post-war settlement and continued Anglo-American relations should the British fail to embrace the implications of Article 7. Not only might this, 'affect the whole view the Americans take of us as partners in world affairs', but given the, 'tendency of America to assume international responsibilities, commensurate with its resources', any action on the part of Britain, 'which might dam back this tendency would have the most unhappy results both for the world and us.' Not only would the United States commitment to the United Nations suffer but Britain's standing as Great Power would be in question; at the same time the crucial economic support of the Americans for the weakened British economy, and European reconstruction, might be in doubt. Hall-Patch concluded that the consequences of British resistance to American demands were too great, 'We are on the threshold of a

³⁷ Carr, F., "Cold War: The Economic and Foreign Policy", in Fyrth, J., (ed.), *Labour's High Noon, the Government and the Economy 1945-51*, 1993, p. 135.

great and beneficial change in America, and we should be chary of action which would hamper or arrest the present trend.’³⁸

Opinion outside Whitehall was also apparently aware of the connotations for Britain of American policy. In his memorandum Hall-Patch cited a leader in *The Times* that in his opinion expressed:

...in words to which nobody in the Foreign Office would dissent, the implications of the present trend in America, and it indicates that public opinion in this country is commencing to weigh these implications.³⁹

As 1944 drew to a close, *The Economist* had voiced concern about American dictatorial policies:

...let an end be put to the policy of appeasement which, at Mr. Churchill’s personal bidding, has been followed, with all the humiliation and abasements it has brought in its train, ever since Pearl Harbour removed the need for it. Henceforward if British policies and precautions are to be traded against American promises, the only safe terms are cash and delivery. And, if Americans find this attitude too cynical or superior, they should draw the conclusions that they have twisted the lion’s tail just once too often.⁴⁰

Given the overriding need for American co-operation there was little the British could do but accept the onerous terms of Article 7; as Ronald Campbell pointed out in

³⁸ *DBPO*, srs. I, vol. III, p.4, memorandum by E. L. Hall-Patch, 3/8/45.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, citing *The Times*, 31/7/45.

⁴⁰ Edmunds, R., *Setting the Mould*, p.35, quoting from *The Economist*, 30/12/44. The outburst from the influential *Economist* prompted the Secretary of State, Stettinius, to send a memorandum to the President that defined the policy dilemma confronting the Foreign Office as Britain’s influence and power waned. Stettinius believed the leader:

...represents what is in the mind of millions of Englishmen...the underlying cause is the emotional difficulty which anyone, and especially any Englishman, has in adjusting to a secondary role after having always accepted a leading one as his national right.

Edmunds, p.36, *ff*, Stettinius to Roosevelt, 2/1/45, *DSDF*, 711.41/1-245, National Archives.

an earlier minute to Orme Sargent. British rejection of the offending article would, ‘gain spontaneous and often unthinking response from the U.S. public’, and that was ‘worthy of mention in your “Stocktaking after VE Day”’, as important ‘in estimating the prospects of Anglo-American co-operation.’⁴¹ Although Sargent did not recommend rejection of Article 7 he did not apparently judge Campbell’s, or Hall-Patch’s advice worthy of inclusion in the final draft of ‘Stocktaking’.

Having discussed the need for a confrontation with Moscow in Eastern Europe, if possible with American assistance, Sargent went on to analyse the political problems arising from Germany’s defeat and their consequences. Significantly, he only focused on a unified state, despite the debate during the war on the benefits of dismemberment or division, Sargent persisted with the view he had expressed at the time of Gladwyn Jebb’s draft Four Power Plan in 1942, that Germany should remain a single entity.

Recognising the inherent German tendency toward authoritarianism, Sargent suggested that Britain would need to combat this with, ‘very great efforts to support the cause of “liberalism”’. In a minute attached to ‘Stocktaking’ John Troutbeck of the German Department wondered if this was advisable; if the intention was to keep the country weak it would hardly be, ‘a good advertisement for liberalism elsewhere’ and would only create the conditions which would encourage the forces of illiberalism, ‘whether Germans or Russians’. Troutbeck advised his superior that the best regime for Germany in the present state of the country could only be a dictatorship, either in

⁴¹ *DBPO*, srs. I, vol. I, p. 1190, Campbell to Sargent, 29/7/45.

the form of an, ‘Allied military government or a German government,’ and concluded it was not, in Britain’s power, ‘to impose anything in Germany as whole’ without consultation with the four occupying powers.⁴²

On this occasion Sargent acknowledged Troutbeck’s intervention and in the final draft of ‘Stocktaking’ concurred that there may be a need, ‘for a temporary dictatorship’, but it should not be ‘exercised by the Germans but must be a dictatorship resulting from Allied occupation’, which would allow the restoration of economic order and give liberalism time to, ‘Take root.’ Sargent was however aware of the threat the Soviet Union posed to his plans for Germany, and for the consequences for liberalism elsewhere.

As Sargent observed, the allies had yet to reach agreement on the settlement of Germany, and in the circumstances it was possible, in time, that the Germans might attempt to, ‘play off each of the three Great Powers one against the other’, and there was a danger that in such a competition, ‘the Soviet Government’ had ‘the best chance of carrying off the prize’. (This prospect was to haunt the west for many years until the western half of the country, at least, was firmly anchored to social democracy through the institutions of NATO and the European Economic Community.) Orme Sargent feared, as did many in the west during the early years of the Cold War, that if Moscow succeeded in carrying off the prize it could well decide, ‘the future of Europe and of “liberalism” throughout the world.’⁴³

⁴² ‘Stocktaking’, an attached minute by John Troutbeck, 19/7/45.

⁴³ Ibid.

Orme Sargent was undoubtedly optimistic in believing, given her dire economic situation that Britain could play the influential role he proposed in Germany and the rest of Western Europe. As Mary Fulbrook has pointed out in her comprehensive and approachable analysis of twentieth century Germany, it was in fact American influence, rather than that of Britain, which played the greater role in:

...setting West Germany on the course of a moderate, liberal-conservative form of western capitalism. And the importance of the economic success of that form of capitalism for the subsequent political stability of West Germany can scarcely be overrated.⁴⁴

The course of the Cold War did however vindicate Orme Sargent's general thesis that Germany would play a pivotal role in the outcome of post-war settlement; the division, ideologically, of the country into two states representing the influence of both rivals, the United States and the Soviet Union, in a divided Europe played a major part in the conflict. Britain was confined to an auxiliary role despite Sargent's admonition in 'Stocktaking' that it should be otherwise.

Having largely confined his analysis to the problems of post-war Europe, Orme Sargent could not ignore the British interests in the Far East, although, as he pointed out, whilst the war there continued, 'it was impossible to foresee what will be the relative positions of both victors and vanquished' when 'victory was finally achieved.' Unaware that the use of the atomic bomb would foreshorten the war against Japan, Sargent clearly envisaged a greater role for the Soviet Union in the region.

Consequently, Sargent's proposed policy in the Far East was nothing less than a reflection of his European strategy. Britain's best interest would be to pursue a policy

⁴⁴ Fulbrook, M., *The Divided Nation: History of Germany, 1918-1990*, 1991, p. 160.

of, 'co-operation between the three Great Powers', whilst organising a coalition 'under our leadership' of the 'lesser colonial Powers who have a stake in the Far East', including, 'France, the Netherlands and Australia.'⁴⁵

After reading the initial draft of 'Stocktaking', John Sterndale Bennett, Sargent's junior by some ten years but with greater experience in various postings abroad, criticised his superior's optimism, reiterating the doubts already expressed that Britain's prestige had, 'received a very severe blow'. Bennett was doubtful, unless 'We take a more active interest in the Far East' to 're-establish our influence there', that his superior's hopes for tripartite co-operation in the region would not materialise, there being little hope of organising the "lesser colonial powers" otherwise. The consequences would be twofold: both the United States and Russia would ignore Britain, and the smaller powers, 'would gravitate to the United States'. More worryingly, in Bennett's view was the distinct preoccupation with Europe evident in 'Stocktaking', 'We are in danger of regarding ourselves as a European Power', overlooking that Britain was, 'still the centre of an Empire', which bestowed the status of World Power; should current policy continue to ignore this fact, 'we shall certainly cease to be one.'⁴⁶

Orme Sargent was prepared to recognise this criticism sufficiently to add Bennett's comments almost verbatim in his final document; however, it is questionable whether or not they were correct in the circumstances. 'Stocktaking's' prescient emphasis on linking Britain's future to Europe rather than the Empire connection, although this was not ignored through the proposed inclusion of the Commonwealth in the Western

⁴⁵ 'Stocktaking'.

⁴⁶ 'Stocktaking', minute attached by John Sterndale Bennett, 21/7/45.

Bloc, presaged the painful debate over the next twenty to thirty years as to where the country's future lay. The inexorable reality of the Cold War, poor performance economically and the need to engage the United States in Europe, dictated British policy accordingly. Paradoxically it was the Americans who would contribute to the dichotomy in British policy; on the one hand they would encourage a commitment to Europe, whilst on the other they were, despite earlier policy, reluctant to see the Empire broken-up, grateful for its contribution as a balance to Soviet expansionism in the Middle and Far East. (See Chapter 3.)

Despite its egregious shortcomings, the retention of British influence in Central and South Eastern Europe and the vain hope of a Western Bloc including support from the Commonwealth to enhance Britain's status as an independent force, 'Stocktaking After VE Day' undoubtedly synthesised British post-war policy after a major, and at times acrimonious, debate during the war. As Sargent recognised in his summing-up, it would be necessary in the pursuance of, 'this policy of "liberalism"', for Britain to take risks, 'and even live beyond our political means'. Central to that incredibly bold statement were, despite his initial exclusion of the United States from the Western Bloc, Britain's efforts to involve the massive power of the Americans in the future of Europe, gravitating, as Sargent had recognised, round the eventual political identity of Germany.

CHAPTER THREE

DOUBTS, DEBATE AND DENOUEMENT

Throughout World War II the British had considered how to ensure the United States took its place in the post-war settlement, particularly in Europe, to balance initially a resurgent Germany. Most of the wartime debate had focused on the security aspect, but by the summer of 1945 Orme Sargent focused the threat to Britain's political influence in Europe as the Red Army established Soviet hegemony in the eastern half of the continent. Instead of recommending a military solution Sargent suggested a diplomatic approach, backed by the economic power of the United States, but led by the British.

However, it was clear to Sargent and others in the Foreign Office that Britain's status as a world power was now undermined by the emergence of the two superpowers. To enhance Britain's position Sargent had adopted the idea discussed during the war of a Western European Bloc led by Britain and the Commonwealth, but not including the United States, as had been the original intention. At the same time it was hoped continued tripartite co-operation would also contribute to Britain's standing as a world power.

In the five years after 1945 the British exploited events, and what influence they had, to achieve an outcome which not only enhanced their status but succeeded in creating an alliance which maintained the balance of power in Europe led by the United States.

Doubts and Debate

In the late autumn of 1945 John Balfour, the First Minister in the Washington Embassy, confirmed what Orme Sargent had already anticipated. In a memorandum to the Foreign Office Balfour warned, 'that the prevailing tendency' in Washington was, 'rather to regard Britain as the junior partner in an American orbit of world power', but 'whose survival as a strong and prosperous country is essential to America both from the point of view of preserving Western democratic values and the security of United States itself.'¹

Although Balfour had identified to great extent the future course of Anglo-American relations, in which Britain and the Empire would play a major part in the containment of the Soviet Union, he was unable to provide any evidence that the United States would in the immediate future support Sargent's proposed initiative against Soviet influence in Eastern Europe. Indeed, he suggested that the pre-eminent concern of American foreign policy was to continue Roosevelt's intention of pursuing cordial relations with the Soviet Union to, 'ensure the perpetuation of world peace'. Although Roosevelt had tended to lead public opinion the new administration was more likely to propitiate, 'what they conceive to be the prevailing sentiments of Congress and important pressure groups'.²

¹ *DBPO, srs 1, vol. IV, p.2*, memorandum by Mr. Balfour, *Analysis of the present attitude of United States towards world affairs*, 28/11/45.

Balfour had identified the major problem the British would confront in future years: whatever initiatives they proposed, the power of Congress to decide the outcome was continually invoked by the administration in Washington. This was more than evident during the protracted loan negotiations of 1945-46 when it was repeatedly suggested to London that Congress would be more likely to approve it if the British agreed to the surrender of bases in the Pacific and the Atlantic.³

There was a suspicion within the Foreign Office that the bases issue was only a means to further American commercial aviation interests. Not wishing to concede an American advantage in this respect the British stood firm and the bases negotiations ground to a halt, whilst in the summer of 1946 Congress approved the loan to Britain.

By refusing to bow to American demands the Foreign Office had clearly indicated a British determination not to succumb to American pressure, whilst demonstrating that by careful argument of her case Congress would eventually recognise American interests would be best served by supporting a strong and economically viable ally with a role to play in the world. This would prove to be invaluable in subsequent British policy initiatives later in the development of the Anglo-American post-war relationship, and the eventual commitment of the United States to the security and reconstruction of Western Europe.

² Ibid.

³ On the termination of Lend-Lease by President Truman in August 1945, Britain's economic position was precarious and the eminent economist Lord Keynes was dispatched to Washington to negotiate further assistance from the United States. Keynes originally believed that he could obtain an interest free grant of £1500 million, but the Americans were less than agreeable. The negotiations dragged on from September to December, and finally a loan of \$3700 million over fifty years at 2 per cent interest, plus a payment of \$620 million to settle the Lend-Lease debt, was the best Keynes could extract. The negotiations are fully documented *DBPO, srs. I, vol. III*; whilst the economic and political

However, it was the question of co-operation with the Soviet Union that came close to causing a rift in Anglo-American relations, and the first serious signs that tripartite goodwill would be difficult to maintain. The Potsdam Conference had devolved the negotiations for an eventual peace settlement to the Foreign Ministers of five great powers: the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France and China, the permanent members of the new United Nations Security Council. And it was the first Conference of Foreign Ministers in London that revealed the tensions within the wartime alliance. Given that the glue that had held the alliance together, despite their disparate political and economic ideologies, no longer existed after the defeat of the Axis Powers, it was not surprising that real differences would now emerge. At the various tripartite meetings there had always been an underlying tension even at times of apparent personal accord; the Soviets had always suspected western motives, particularly the delayed invasion of Europe, whereas the west most of the time appeased Stalin in the hope that their worst fears about post-war Soviet intentions would be allayed.

There is abundant coverage of the first Foreign Ministers Conference in various works,⁴ and there is little point in expanding on the details here. However, it was clear from the outset that there was little in common between Bevin's approach and that of Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister. Both the new Foreign Secretary and the relatively inexperienced Secretary of State, James Byrnes, were clearly unable to achieve any agreement with the wily Russian when it became immediately apparent that he was not only going to employ spoiling tactics, questioning the inclusion of the

ramifications are covered in the final volume of Alan Bullock's magisterial trilogy on the life and career of Bevin, *Ernest Bevin Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951*, 1983, chs. 4 and 5.

⁴ The best, and most incisive, account is undoubtedly in Bullock pp. 129-137. A broader, and more detailed, documentary record of the meeting is available in *DBPO*, srs. I, vol. II.

French and the Chinese, but also using the conference to achieve Soviet gains in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Interestingly, from the point of view of British policy with respect to the future of Western Europe and the Western Bloc concept in general, Bevin did raise with Molotov at a bilateral meeting the prospect of an Anglo-French treaty. He pointed out that although the Cabinet had not made a substantive decision on this matter, and the British did not want to raise any suspicions that two countries were close it would be in both their interests, and that of the Soviet Union, to have a treaty, 'on the same lines', as the Franco-Soviet treaty. The Foreign Secretary forcefully indicated that this was no way a precursor to a Western Bloc, and he would say so in the House of Commons; indeed, he did not like slogans such as, 'western *blocs* or eastern *blocs*'. (Emphasis in the original.) Molotov, guardedly, noted that he would like to report to Moscow, but could see no objection provided the purpose of the treaty was on the lines of that between France and the Soviet Union, 'against German aggression.'⁵

Perhaps Bevin was naïve to believe that Molotov would accept his apparent, implied bargaining plea, that in exchange for Western Europe foregoing an alliance the Soviet Union would dismantle its inchoate bloc in the east; but undoubtedly his pointed refutation of the Western Bloc concept at this stage was a clear indication that his strategy was nothing less than continued appeasement of the Soviets to further Anglo-Soviet relations in the context of tripartite co-operation.

⁵ Record of a conversation between Mr. Bevin and M. Molotov, 27/9/45, *DBPO*, srs. I, vol. II, p. 323.

The London Council of Foreign Ministers ended in acrimony with the possibility of another meeting far from certain. In the meantime Bevin, concerned that co-operation was less than apparent, prompted a further consideration of the Western Bloc concept as a balancing force. Bevin noted in a memorandum written in early November 1945: whereas the United States appeared to be establishing its own sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere and the Far East, and the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, Britain and France would be confronted with the unenviable task of defending, not only their respective empires, but 'if this sphere of influence business does develop it will leave and us and France on the outer circle of Europe with our friends, such as Italy, Greece'. Although ready to advocate that Britain's interest should be pursued through the United Nations to counteract such tendencies, he was clearly aware that if this situation continued the third sphere should be pursued, 'the only safe course' would be Britain developing relations, 'with out near neighbours in the same way as the United States have developed their relations on the continent of America.'⁶

Despite the Foreign Secretary's pessimism, which at the end of the day signalled his acceptance of Western Bloc as the last resort of British policy, Neville Butler, in a summary of a memorandum from the British ambassador in Washington Lord Halifax, noted that all the signs from the American administration, and from Congress, indicated that there was general support for, 'one world' springing from 'a core of genuine idealism which has traditionally influenced the American approach to international affairs.' Butler was of the opinion that although there was much to be said, 'for taking' the administration's attitude toward the United Nations for granted, it

⁶ Memorandum by Mr. Bevin on the Foreign Situation, 8/11/45, *DBPO*, srs. 1, vol. III, pp. 310-313.

was up to Britain, 'to stand up for what we consider to be right and not defer automatically to American wishes.'⁷

However, an early attempt by Bevin to 'stand up' for what he considered right resulted in an embarrassing climb down that, significantly, could have had far reaching ramifications for Britain's standing as a major partner with the United States. Bevin's irritation that Byrnes failed to consult him before proposing a tripartite meeting in Moscow to Molotov was understandable, but at the end of the day it could have endangered the whole British post-war diplomatic strategy. Although the British had successfully resisted American pressure over the bases issue it is hard to conceive of many situations, given the weakness of the Foreign Office's hand, where Butler's suggested tactics could have been used with any certainty of success.

Now it appeared that the British were definitely being treated, as forecast by John Balfour, as the junior partner. Bevin was informed of the Byrnes's initiative by the Moscow ambassador Sir Archibald Clark Kerr on the 24 November, the day after Molotov had been handed Byrnes's personal message. Recognising his superior's probable anger at being ignored by the Americans, Clark Kerr despatched another telegram the same day urging Bevin to overlook, 'this lapse from Anglo-American good manners established during the six years of war', and urged him nonetheless to travel to Moscow as he 'should welcome a meeting between yourself, Molotov and Stalin on their own ground.'⁸

⁷ FO800/513/US/46/13, Lord Halifax's comments on the Secretary of State's memorandum of 8/11/46.

⁸ *DBPO*, srs. I, vol. II, Clark Kerr to Bevin, 24/11/45, Moscow 4.14 p.m., pp. 635-36; Clark Kerr to Bevin, 24/11/45, Moscow 6.8 p.m., p636.

Slighted, and clearly aware that the proposed meeting on 11 December would allow little time for preparation resulting in another abortive attempt to reconcile tripartite differences, Bevin advised Byrnes that he would not be able to attend the meeting at the time proposed, and that he and the Prime Minister believed that 'another Foreign Secretaries conference without adequate preparation would only lead to another failure. I can't afford another failure.'⁹ A rather strange assertion in that at the time Bevin's position and status in the Labour Party was unassailable, it was not until late 1946 when criticism of his policies emerged from within the party.¹⁰ In some respects Bevin's ill health may have played a part in his reluctance to undertake the long journey to Moscow, although he must have been aware that sooner or later the rotating venue for the Conference of Foreign Ministers would require this, but there was still the feeling that Byrnes had ignored British sensibilities. At the same time Bevin's poor performance in London, despite many briefing papers before hand, must have entered his mind given the short notice.

Eventually, after another plea from Clark Kerr in Moscow recognising the Foreign Secretary's misgivings but regretting his, 'disinclination to come to Moscow',¹¹ Bevin finally telegraphed Lord Halifax in Washington indicating his willingness to travel, 'In deference to Mr. Byrnes's strong views...on the understanding that it is an exploratory Conference' the objective being 'to ascertain and examine the difficulties between the

⁹ Ibid., p. 639, teletype conversation between Bevin and Byrnes, 27/11/45.

¹⁰ Alan Bullock once more supplies the details of this event when a left wing group within the Labour Party proposed, 'an amendment to the King's Speech criticising the Governments foreign policy.' At the end of the day the motion failed to gain support and was defeated in the House 353-0, although, as Bullock points out the number of abstentions was significant; a total of 130 Labour MPs abstained within the party's overall strength of 352. A, 'demonstration of disapproval which clearly extended beyond the Left-wing of the Party.' Bullock, pp. 327-9.

¹¹ Ibid., p.646, Clark Kerr to Bevin, 29/11/45.

three Great Powers before the United Nations Assembly meet.’¹² In the end the Moscow meeting, despite its inauspicious gestation was more than substantive; the Soviets were clearly more relaxed on their own territory, and Bevin appears to have been at his diplomatic best despite the long journey and having to spend Christmas in Moscow. Once more it is impossible to cover the conference in detail but again the discussions are covered adequately in other works.¹³ However, the final report of the meeting indicated substantial agreement on many of the outstanding issues left in abeyance by the break-up of the London Conference of Foreign Ministers, including: the preparation of the peace treaties with former enemy states in Europe, excluding Germany, which paved the way for the eventual peace conference in Paris in the summer of 1946; the establishment of a Far Eastern Commission and Allied Council for Japan, and an agreement to establish of United Nations Commission for the Control of Atomic Energy.¹⁴

In many ways, despite its apparent success, the Moscow Conference only papered over the cracks appearing in tripartite co-operation; it proved impossible to get Molotov to agree on the final withdrawal of Soviet forces in Iran as required under the terms of the tripartite agreement of 1942.¹⁵ Whilst the Cabinet congratulated the

¹² Ibid., p. 655, Bevin to Halifax, 6/12/45. The first meeting of the United Nations General Assembly was due to convene in London in early January 1946.

¹³ Once more Bullock in *Ernest Bevin Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951*, pp. 206-213; *DBPO*, srs I., vol. II., pp. 635-927, for copious documentation.

¹⁴ *DBPO*, srs. I, vol. II, Report of the Meeting of the Foreign Secretaries of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, Moscow, 27/12/45, pp. 905-913.

¹⁵ After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Britain and Soviet Union agreed to occupy Iran to secure a channel for supplies to the latter. Both undertook to remove their occupying forces within six months of the war ending. However, as the war progressed all three allies, America, Britain and the Soviet Union, attempted to gain oil concessions from the Iranians, who deferred a decision until the war ended. Consequently, it became more than apparent that Moscow was intent on gaining a political advantage in the country, establishing control of the northern province of Azerbaijan, thus exerting political pressure on Teheran. At the end of the war Stalin continued to exert pressure on the Iranians and refused to remove Soviet troops despite agreeing a partial withdrawal at the Potsdam conference. The issue was to become the first standoff between the former allies; both the

Foreign Secretary on his return from Moscow, ‘on the success of his mission’,¹⁶ press opinion in Britain was hardly encouraging. *The Economist* observed that Bevin had achieved little, ‘in return for abandoning his objections to the regimes in Rumania and Bulgaria’, and had received little in the way of ‘suitable compensation for his compliance’ with respect to two questions ‘over which British diplomacy is most particularly exercised’, Persia and Germany.¹⁷ Bullock concludes that Byrnes was only interested:

... in Eastern Europe and the Far East, not in the Middle East, and let the Russians see that Bevin had little support from the USA. It did not take much diplomatic skill on the Russian part to separate the two Western Powers and leave the British isolated.¹⁸

The Observer ominously noted that there appeared to be a Russio-American compromise, ‘in which Russia got the best deal’ leaving Britain out, signifying:

The first open signs of a narrowing down of the circle of real Great Powers from the Big Three to the Big Two. Britain...just strong enough to hang on permanently, unlike France, to the exclusive innermost circle of the biggest Powers; she no longer seems to carry sufficient weight to get her way or even to make others meet her half-way on any fundamental questions.¹⁹

By the end of 1945 it is abundantly clear that not only were the Americans anticipating Britain’s decline, although prepared to accept she had some usefulness, there was also a domestic concern that the country was slipping from the first rank of world powers. All was not lost; events were to play a significant part in the restoration,

British and the Americans pressed Moscow to abide by the original agreement, but, finally recognising that Stalin was intent on the expansion of Soviet influence, the matter was referred to the United Nations. In May 1946 Soviet troops were finally withdrawn. Accounts of the Iranian situation are available in various books, but reference to the index of Bullock, *Ernest Bevin Foreign Secretary*, reveals much of the detail.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 924, Extract from Cabinet Conclusions C.M. (46) I of 1/1/45.

¹⁷ Bullock, p. 212, quoting from *The Economist*, 5/1/46.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 212-13, quoting from *The Observer*, 30/12/45.

however temporary, of Britain's status whilst at the same time playing a major part in the realisation of Orme Sargent's aim of involving the United States in the reconstruction of Western Europe and ultimately its security.

The initial demarche was the British decision to refer the outstanding situation in Iran to the first United Nations Security Council meeting in London in early 1946; this initiative demonstrated a commitment to the universal aspirations of the United States despite Orme Sargent's obvious disregard of the institution in 'Stocktaking After VE Day', and did no harm to Britain's standing within the administration in Washington.

The crisis in Iran was to drag on for another four months before the Soviets withdrew their troops, but the Foreign Office persisted in pursuing the issue through the United Nations. Meanwhile events on the other side of the Atlantic were moving in their favour, although Churchill's speech at Fulton in March 1946 has been the topic of much historical debate as to whether or not Truman and the administration connived with the ex- Prime Minister.²⁰

Churchill's speech probably did more than any previous British initiatives in galvanising debate in the United States to the extent that American opinion of the

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 212-13.

²⁰ Significantly Halifax telegraphed to Bevin his view that:

It was generally assumed that both President Truman and His Majesty's Government were privy to Mr. Churchill's speech in Missouri, and that fact, in addition to Mr. Churchill's own exceptional appeal to Americans, has resulted in the keenest attention being paid to the speech throughout the country. Although the bulk of the press and of Congress are clearly unwilling to endorse it as an adequate solution to the present troubles, it has given the sharpest jolt to American thinking of any utterances since the end of the war. *DBPO*, srs. I, vol. IV, p. 153, Earl of Halifax to Mr. Bevin, 10/3/46. The details of the development of the speech, and as to why it was delivered in Fulton, are comprehensively covered in Gilbert, M, *Never Despair, Winston S. Churchill 1945-1965*, 1988, pp. 180-296.

Soviet Union, and Britain's continued role as an ally, was changed forever. Although both governments swiftly moved to deny complicity with Churchill's stark warning of Soviet intentions, and his call for an Anglo-American union, there is much evidence that, although not prepared to endorse the speech outright, both knew that it would be controversial. Churchill read the speech to Truman during the train journey to Fulton, but also took the precaution of informing the British government of his intentions.²¹ Not only did both governments refrain from preventing Churchill's speech by advising caution, it was welcomed as a positive contribution to Anglo-American relations, and most certainly as a catalyst to the confrontation with the Soviet Union, which at this time preoccupied the British Foreign Office and the Americans more than hitherto.

Quite to what degree Truman was influenced by the Fulton speech and Churchill's warning about Soviet strategy may be open to conjecture, but suffice to say the battleship *Missouri* was within a few days despatched to the Eastern Mediterranean, ostensibly returning the remains of the former Turkish ambassador to his homeland, but more importantly indicating a revived American interest in the Middle East where British interest was focused. Notwithstanding the Foreign Office's concerns about Iran, the first Council of Foreign Ministers had exposed the Soviet desire for a presence in the Mediterranean with a base in Libya and access through Dardanelles. Throughout 1945 and early 1946 Soviet coercion mounted to the point where an invasion of Turkey was anticipated, hence the deployment of the *Missouri* and a British naval squadron to the Eastern Mediterranean.

²¹ Ibid., p. 126, Earl of Halifax (Washington) to Mr. Bevin, 22/2/45, telegram for the Prime Minister from Mr. Churchill. Although he did not specifically outline the anti-Soviet element of his speech, Churchill made it clear to Attlee that he would propose radical, 'arrangements for mutual safety [between the United States and Britain] in case of danger in full loyalty to the [United Nations] Charter.' Suggesting that Churchill had doubts about the United Nations, or of the Soviet adherence to the Charter. The Prime Minister telegraphed back, 'I am sure your Fulton speech will do good.' Ibid.,

Significantly, Churchill's warning had almost coincided with another analysis of Soviet intentions, that of the American Chargé d' Affaires, George Kennan.²² It appears that both initiatives resonated with an emerging appreciation in Washington of the dangers confronting the west should the Soviet Union be allowed to proceed with its current policies unchecked.

In his 10 March telegram, Lord Halifax conveyed the American deepening concern with respect to Soviet tactics, and the response of the Washington administration to Churchill's speech. Halifax drew the Foreign Secretary's attention to the concerns in America with respect to Soviet activities in Manchuria, and the revelations of a spy ring in Canada, which the ambassador observed, had resulted 'in a torrent of speculation concerning the intentions of the U.S.S.R. and the role which the United States should play in world affairs'.²³ In his despatch of 10 March Halifax had noted the, 'profound impact' on American opinion of Churchill's speech, and that it had fallen on 'fertile soil' resulting in the despatch of the *Missouri*.²⁴

p. 132, Mr. Bevin to the Earl of Halifax (Washington), following from Prime Minister for Mr. Churchill, 25/2/46.

²² Although Kennan's famous 'Long Telegram', written in February 1946, became forever associated with the development of the west's military "containment" of the Soviet Union, though he himself later denied this was what he intended. The telegram was a long analysis of the background to the Soviet Union's contemporary views and objectives; Kennan believed that Moscow would take advantage of the west's perceived weaknesses to spread communist ideology throughout the world, particularly in Europe. He suggested that the United States should undertake a programme of informing and educating the American public to the realities of the situation. The 'health and vigour' of American society was essential to counter the spread of Soviet ideology, but the United States also needed to reach out to other nations, Europe in particular needed reassurance and guidance. Kennan recorded his conviction 'that [the] problem is within our power to resolve-and that without recourse to any general conflict.' The full version of the 'Long Telegram' is available in: Jensen, K. M., (ed.), *Origins of the Cold War, the Novikov, Kennan, and Roberts 'Long Telegrams' of 1946*, 1993, pp. 17-31, to which this author is indebted for the above analysis.

²³ Weekly political summary in Washington No. 1363, 2/3/46, FO371AN587/1/46, DBPO, srs. I, vol. IV, p.152, ff. 1. The reference to the Canadian spy ring was as a result of the revelations that the British

In London there was a growing awareness that, at last, Washington was beginning to understand the consequences of Soviet strategy and was more willing to confront the situation with the British. A Foreign Office memorandum written, the editors of *Documents on British Policy Overseas* suggest, by Neville Butler, noted that:

the U.S. Administration is pretty fully alive to the Soviet menace, but in foreign policy an Administration generally follows behind public opinion...American public opinion will be loath to be convinced that Russia requires to be counter-attacked even pacifically.²⁵

Butler was responding to a memorandum by Christopher Warner which had been provoked by the hostile Soviet campaign against Great Britain; the memorandum contributed eventually to the formation of the Russia Committee which was set up with the approval of the new Permanent Under-secretary, Orme Sargent, to explore ways of countering the campaign through diplomatic initiatives and in the media.²⁶

As to the question posed by Warner as to whether or not Britain could expect 'help from the U.S. Govt. in any anti-Communist campaign', as proposed in his memorandum, Butler reinforced Halifax's observations as to the sympathetic response to the Fulton speech, but suggested, as Sargent had done in 'Stocktaking', that the Americans would only be entirely sympathetic if in the suggested foreign publicity campaign we intended, 'to put up a strong and persistent advocacy of the liberal idea, ideologically, economically and politically.'

scientist, Nunn May, had divulged atomic secrets to the Soviets whilst working on the Manhattan Project in Canada.

²⁴ Ibid., Earl of Halifax to Mr. Bevin, 10/3/46.

²⁵ *DBPO*, srs. I, vol. IV, p. 202, Foreign Office Memorandum, 1/4/46.

²⁶ Warner's memorandum was eventually dated 2/4/46, and is the subject of an illuminating essay on the FO's response to this particular problem in, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20.3, 1985, 'The Russia Committee of the British Foreign Office and the Cold War 1946-47', Merrick, R.

It is perhaps a measure of the Machiavellian strategies which the Foreign Office were prepared to pursue to engage the Washington in an anti-Soviet campaign, that Butler concluded, should the Americans seem disposed 'to suggest that we are trying to entangle them vis-à-vis Russia' it would be 'no bad thing' to suggest that a clash with the Soviet Union would not occur necessarily in Europe, the Middle East but in the 'Far East where the Americans are playing the leading hand...'²⁷ This persistent theme eventually contributed to turn the tide of American opinion despite the also clear overriding British desire to maintain some influence in the world whatever the reality of her decline.

With American opinion apparently turning in Britain's favour, 1946 proved to be a year of consolidation both economically and diplomatically. Notably the United States Senate approved, on 10 May, the Loan Agreement thus removing for a time at least the burden of insolvency, although the terms were stringent and, most worryingly, required the pound to be fully convertible by July 1947. Indeed the Americans had got most of what they wanted, apart from the deferment of convertibility. The Agreement required the, 'reduction of the Sterling balances, end of the sterling dollar pool and non-discrimination against American imports.'²⁸ Despite the onerous terms the ratification of the loan removed two major concerns for the British: firstly the prolonged worry about the outcome of the negotiations, and the terms which the

²⁷ *DBPO*, srs. I, vol. IV, pp. 203-4. That this memorandum, as the authors of the *DBPO* series suggest, was Neville Butler may be open to debate; it was certainly written by a senior figure within the foreign service with a broad understanding of prevailing US attitudes, the only other source could have been Sir Ronald Campbell. Both had served as Chargé d' Affairs in the Washington Embassy, but the latter had more current understanding of American attitudes having only recently returned to London from the post.

Who ever wrote the memorandum it, along with that presented by Christopher Warner, suggests a less than subtle change of attitude by the diplomats. The Soviet Union was clearly now considered the major threat despite the wartime prevarications.

Americans would impose; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the loan signified an implicit American commitment to the future stability of Great Britain, not only as a future partner, but also as a bulwark in the world.

Considering the weak bargaining position the British found themselves in (afterall it had been abundantly clear since the Lend-Lease Agreement that the United States would demand a freer international trading and financial system once the war ended), it appeared to be a satisfactory outcome in the short term at least.

Diplomatically there was a consolidation of American and British views on the need to confront the Soviet Union; at the Paris Peace Conference, and the concurrent Council of Foreign Ministers, Byrnes was far more inclined to confront the Soviets rather than mediate between them and the British. How much this was as a result of Churchill's speech is open to debate, but, perhaps, a measure of his success in galvanising western opinion was revealed in two initiatives which were to have profound consequences for the future of Western Europe. In May 1946 Bevin presented a paper to the Cabinet which would set the future of Europe for another forty years. Given the Soviet intransigence over the settlement of Germany he proposed the consolidation of the Western Zones, 'as a single economic unit', and in the words of David Reynolds in a perceptive introduction to a wide ranging analysis of the international origins of the Cold War:

²⁸ Carr, F., 'The Cold War: The Economy and Foreign Policy', in *Labour's High Noon: The Government and the Economy 1945-51*, Fyrth, J., (ed.), 1993, p. 136.

Although this ploy would confirm the Iron Curtain, it would at least ensure that communism stopped at the Elbe.²⁹

Anne Deighton in her comprehensive analysis of Britain's German strategy believed that Bevin's initiative:

In many respects...can be considered as the primary source of Britain's containment policy for Europe.³⁰

The second initiative was a measure of growing Anglo-American accord. Despite Foreign Office doubts as to whether the Americans were ready for such a demarche, on 11 July Byrnes echoed Bevin's earlier proposals by suggesting that the United States was willing, 'to join the American zone with that of any other occupying power.'³¹ Later in the year Brynes was to reiterate American concerns about the future of Germany, and the confrontation with the Soviet Union. In a speech at Strasbourg, he announced that whilst other nations retained military forces in Germany so would the United States. The conditions for the merger of the British and American zones of occupation were in place, consolidating the new Anglo-American approach to European affairs.

During 1946 it was apparent that despite Bevin's objections there were those in the Foreign Office who still saw some advantage in a Western European Bloc. The debate was started early in the year by Sir Nigel Ronald, Assistant Under-Secretary, noting that there had been, 'much loose and ill-conceived talk about the "Western Bloc"', and that it was not in Britain's interest, 'to be deflected from the protection of our vital

²⁹ Reynolds, D., (ed.), *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives*, 1994, 'Great Britain', ed., p. 82.

³⁰ Deighton, A., *The Impossible Peace: Britain, the Division of Germany, and the Origins of the Cold War*, 1993, p. 74.

interests'. Ronald was less concerned about the original concept as means to contain Germany; now that Soviet intentions in Europe were clearly apparent, he suggested that it would be easy for the Soviet Union to pick-off the weak countries of Western Europe unless Britain ensured her interest by taking the lead in the formation of a counter force which would probably remain, 'chimerical until we have made a bilateral treaty with France.'³²

Throughout 1946 the debate within the Foreign Office rumbled on, confirming that the Foreign Secretary's stance on the issue of a Western Bloc was not popular, but interestingly the discussion excluded mention of the United States as a participant, markedly at odds with the original proposals during the early years of the war. In an attempt to bring it to a conclusion the various interlocutors met in December 1946 to reach a conclusive agreement. It was noted that the Chiefs of Staff, retracting their earlier support for the concept (see Chapter One), were convinced that a Western Bloc would contribute little, or nothing, as a method of defence against the Soviet Union; without the contribution of the United States there was only a small chance of Western Europe being able to withstand a Russian attack. The meeting concluded that the scheme must be made 'palatable to Russia', so they did not suspect it as directed against them, which in the current climate might make it unacceptable to the Americans, and as they were the last resort in any hope of defence against the Soviet Union, 'it was therefore, axiomatic that we must *at all costs avoid the risk of antagonising them*.'³³ (Emphasis added.) However, it was clear that little progress could be made without the approval of the Foreign Secretary, who may not have known about the disagreement within the department.

³¹ Reynolds, p. 83.

³² FO371/59911/Z2410, memorandum by Sir Nigel Ronald, 4/1/46.

In the new year Sargent wrote to Bevin, ostensibly expressing his concerns for the prospects for Anglo-American relations should the Foreign Secretary proceed too quickly with an Anglo-French alliance, but also taking the opportunity to remind him of the departments long term goal of a European Group. The new Permanent Under-Secretary advised delay on the immediate issue whilst there were elements of the French Communist Party in the government. The Americans, he observed, were deeply suspicious of communist activity in France, and as Anglo-American collaboration at the time was a 'very tender plant', any 'apparent shift of policy here' would 'be liable to cause valuable American contacts to dry up'. Rather ambiguously Sargent then proceeded to wonder if what was lost with the United States needed to be carefully 'weighed against what we are likely to gain in Europe' with a French treaty: '...if we make every move in the realm of high policy contingent on American prior approval', the prospects of giving a 'lead to Western Europe' and Britain's chance to attain 'what must be our primary objective', a European Group enabling, 'us to deal on a footing of equality with our two gigantic colleagues, the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R.', would be lost.

Sargent advised a gradual approach, giving both the Americans and the Russians time to accustom themselves to the, 'principle of an Anglo-French grouping', which 'at the appropriate moment' would be extended 'to include Holland, Belgium and other like-minded states in Western Europe.'³⁴ Despite Sargent's initial doubts the Anglo-French Treaty was concluded within two months, with a government that

³³ FO371/59911/Z10754, record of meeting in Foreign Office by Sir Horace Rumbold, 31/12/46.

³⁴ FO371/67670/Z11125, minute from Sargent to Bevin, 1/1/47.

included communists, as much out of a desire on Bevin's part to show solidarity with the beleaguered French as of any real notion of *realpolitik*.³⁵

Sargent's doubts about American acquiescence were unfounded as the events related below clearly reveal, although he had to wait almost another twelve months before the Foreign Secretary would take the next step toward the fulfilment of his plan for a Western Bloc. Bevin, meanwhile, was still determined to pursue a strategy of tripartite co-operation.

Late in 1946 it was decided by various members of the Foreign Office that a review of Sargent's July 1945 memorandum would be appropriate in view of the current situation. Naturally it was given the title of 'Stocktaking II', and Sir Oliver Harvey, now Deputy Under Secretary, presided over the preparation of a joint paper during January 1947.

Gladwyn Jebb, responsible for the analysis of the United Nations, was even less optimistic for the future of the organisation than he had been in 1945, observing:

The universal system which is supposed to exist is unfortunately less real than the divisions which appear all the time, not least within the organs of the United Nations Organisation itself.

³⁵ A full account of the negotiations appears in Bullock, pp. 357-9. Bevin took the initiative after a plea from the Blum caretaker government for more coal from the British zone in Germany. The Foreign Secretary invited Blum to London and, in a somewhat emotional atmosphere, it was agreed talks would proceed to conclude a treaty which in the end was purely a security arrangement directed against Germany. Although it appears Bevin would have liked to have gone further and included an economic element, but was restrained by the President of the Board of Trade, Stafford Cripps. By 28 February agreement had been reached and the final Anglo-French Treaty was signed by the Foreign Secretary in Dunkirk on 4 March.

Jebb concluded its incidental value, as the Soviet Union had shown less than wholehearted support preferring to lower its prestige by using the United Nations as propaganda forum, was now a focus, 'for the United States interest in world affairs.' Whilst at same time though the Soviets were evidently not prepared to let it function effectively, they were not at not apparently willing to destroy the organisation.

The Northern Department and the Russia Committee judged the prospects for tripartite co-operation as equally bleak; they considered co-operation was no longer possible given that the 'leaders of the Soviet Union', whilst not contemplating immediate war were, 'convinced of the inevitability of clash between the Communist State and the capitalist world.' As for Sargent's distinctly optimistic belief that Britain could maintain an influence in Eastern Europe, it was, 'feared that any country which comes under Soviet political influence' was lost 'to rest of world as an export market or a source of raw materials.'

As for the Western Bloc, Sir Edmund Hall-Patch judged that there had been little opportunity to make headway in building up 'a bloc of Western Democratic States' under British leadership due to the strength of the Communist Party in France. However, although not directly associating this failure with Britain's economic weakness, the inference was clear when he suggested, 'We have seldom been able to give sufficient economic backing to our policy...'

The one outstanding hope appeared to be the United States in which Sargent had invested so much faith whilst at the same time exercising caution as to her reliability. The authors of 'Stocktaking II' were certainly impressed with the change in American

attitude since 1945. They concluded that, whereas initially the Americans, 'would try to avoid committing themselves' and pursued a policy of mediation when confronted by the prospect of an Anglo-Soviet conflict, they now appeared to accept the likelihood of a conflict between themselves and the Russians as more likely. As, 'a result, they are consciously or unconsciously tending to claim leadership of any forces in the world which are willing to stand up to excessive Soviet pretensions.'

In the prevailing circumstances it was concluded that tripartite co-operation was desirable, but unlikely, whereas any policy of independence from the United States, 'in light of our present military and economic weakness' and the Soviet threat to British interests, 'would be a dangerous luxury.'³⁶

If Britain could not afford to be too independent of the United States it was however possible that she could capitalise on the apparent American tendency to lead world forces against the Soviet Union. In February 1947 that is just what the Foreign Office did. Although it is by no means certain that the installation of the new American Secretary of State, George Marshall, may have played some part in the eventual success of the British *démarche* over Greece and Turkey, his obvious experience of international diplomacy and Anglo-American co-operation during the war may have played a significant part in the State Department's response. As Army Chief of Staff Marshall had attended all of the major alliance meetings, whereas his predecessor, James Byrnes, whose experience was mainly in domestic politics, had only been present at the Yalta Conference. Marshall's retention of the Anglophile Dean Acheson

³⁶ All of the above from: FO371/66546/76/U76/G, 'Stocktaking II', January 1947.

as his deputy may have also inclined the State Department to be a little more sympathetic to the British.

The Foreign Office's approach to Washington to assume responsibility for the defence of Greece and Turkey was provoked, in late 1946, by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Dalton, warning the Cabinet that the American loan was speedily being depleted. He asked the government to consider cuts in military expenditure overseas, particularly to Greece and Turkey. Bevin, given Foreign Office concerns as to Soviet incursions into both countries, resisted, but the severe winter of 1947 placed a further drain on British resources and in February it was decided to approach the Americans for assistance.

Although the State Department knew from their representatives in Greece that the British position was precarious and expected an approach for help, it was the manner of the approach that was suspicious. In many ways it was an ultimatum contained in two documents presented to the State Department on the Friday afternoon 21 February; in his memoirs Acheson described them as 'shockers.'³⁷ The stark proposal was that British aid would be withdrawn from Greece and Turkey at the end of March, although, ultimately, the British were finally prevailed upon to retain some troops in Greece for a few more years.

Was this a deliberate attempt on the part of Bevin and the Foreign Office to capitalise, as 'Stocktaking II' had suggested, on the apparent American desire to assume a position of leadership in the free world, whilst at the same time taking

³⁷ Acheson, D., *Present at the Creation, My Years in the State Department*, 1969, p. 217.

advantage of the new situation in the State Department? As Robert Frazier has pointed out in his essay refuting this suggestion:

...there is little to support the idea that Bevin was engaged in some devious manoeuvre with regard to Greece. He must have welcomed the new attitude of the United States, and perhaps, in hindsight, he convinced himself that he deserved some credit for the change [in American policy], but there is no evidence presently available of a deliberate plot.³⁸

Frazier had the advantage of access to government papers, whereas Francis Williams, writing shortly after Bevin's death, but relying on his position as personal friend, was sure that the latter took full advantage of the situation to further British interests. Williams was of the opinion that Bevin had considered Orme Sargent's proposals for European countervailing third force as unlikely, in the time available, to provide 'a stable power strong enough to meet and check the encroaching power of Russia.' Only a 'fuller partnership in the security of Europe' on the part the United States would ensure world stability in view 'of the Soviet ambition to dominate Europe if she could.'³⁹ Williams believed that Bevin continued to exercise patience until the time was right to fully engage the United States in the affairs of Europe and 'he judged that this moment and this issue had arrived in Greece in February 1947'. After two years of carrying the burden of holding off the threat of a Soviet threat to Greece, Bevin took the initiative, in view of the prevailing situation, to shock the Washington administration into 'a major policy decision.'⁴⁰

Although there may not be evidence 'of a deliberate plot', it cannot be ignored that the salient feature of British policy during the war, and subsequently, was the engagement of the United States in Europe. Despite the doubts of the early post war

³⁸ Frazier, R., 'Did Britain Start the Cold War? Bevin and the Truman Doctrine', *The Historical Journal*, 27.3 (1984), p. 720.

³⁹ Williams, F., *Ernest Bevin, Portrait of a Great Englishman*, 1952, pp. 262-3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

years about the Western Bloc, with or without the Americans, the overriding judgement at the end of the day, as reflected in the conclusions of 'Stocktaking II', was that little could be achieved without an American contribution to the reconstruction and defence of Europe. Although there had been a period of doubt as to American intentions, once the opportunity was presented to draw the United States in to Europe there was no need for copious discussion committed to documents; the initiative was taken instinctively, and with the ultimate emergence of the Truman Doctrine, much facilitated by Dean Acheson, the British strategy was at least partially showing signs of success.⁴¹

Denouement

In Chapter Two a reference was made to the suggestion that the diplomats in the Foreign Office may have influenced Ernest Bevin more than was in the best interest of British foreign policy. The fact that he persevered with the first tenet of Orme Sargent's analysis, tripartite co-operation, when there was a body of opinion within the Foreign Office inclined to support Sargent's proposal for a third force, is a tribute to his independence. Confronted with the American policy of co-operation and mediation Bevin adopted the best policy he could in the circumstances, despite his own inclinations toward European unity. Only after much effort and perseverance did Bevin abandon hope of achieving some understanding with Moscow.

⁴¹ As Bullock suggests (*Ernest Bevin Foreign Secretary*, ff. p. 370,) there is little point in covering here the details of the development of the Doctrine, but, as he recommends, the first hand account of the process by Joseph M. Jones in *The Fifteen Days*, 1955, has no equal. Jones was at the time a member of staff in the State Department and played an intimate roll in drafting Truman's speech to a joint session of Congress on March 12.

Although the Truman Doctrine, and the subsequent announcement by Marshall of his economic plan for Europe, undoubtedly assuaged some British concern about the commitment of the Americans, it appeared there was still much to be done to secure a full engagement of the United States in Europe. But as the bleak winter of 1947 took its toll on the British economy Bevin was forced to consider a policy that could have endangered the relationship with Washington.

Concerns about Britain's economic future were now beginning to resurface despite the American Loan. In March the Chancellor issued another stark warning that the dollar credit was being exhausted 'at a reckless, and ever accelerating, speed', such that it would be exhausted by February 1948. Dalton urged, because of American inflation, the drain could only be alleviated by switching, 'as much as we can, from dollar to non-dollar sources for supply.'⁴²

⁴² CAB 129 C.P. (47) 100, 'Exhaustion of the Dollar Credit', memorandum by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 21/3/47. In early March, whilst Bevin was at the Moscow Council of Foreign Ministers meeting, Dalton telegraphed him pointing out Britain's difficulties, although there appears to be an underlying purpose given the Foreign Secretary's access to Marshall at this time. The Chancellor noted that soon Britain would have to make the pound convertible under the Loan Agreement; he felt that this could not be postponed, but 'It would, of course, be very agreeable if we could get, say, another \$1,000 million from the U.S. in addition to the Credit already extended.' Dalton doubted the wisdom of confronting Marshall on the matter, but, 'if he were to offer or suggest it, there is no reason for you to conceal the fact that it would ease our difficulties a good deal.'

Dalton, aware that he would have to give Bevin an opportunity to raise the issues, or at least provide a means for Marshall to respond, suggested that the Foreign Secretary should ask the Americans to accept not only more responsibility for expenses in Germany, but also Greece and Palestine: 'Would not Truman like to take the mandate [for Palestine]? *I wonder!*' (Emphasis added.) FO800/514/US/47/20, 3/3/47.

Initially Bevin replied that he could not push Marshall as he had a lot on his plate; however '...we will have very shortly to discuss our financial position quite frankly with the Americans and that our expenditure in Germany will have to form the main pivot of the discussion.' FO800/514/US/22, 7/3/47.

Two weeks later Bevin had apparently relented; although he felt that he could not raise the issue of the fusion of the two German zones, he had acquainted Marshall with, 'the danger of the position, [presumably Britain's economic difficulties] and I think he has it well in his mind.' FO800/514/US/47/25, 24/3/47.

Subsequently Bevin raised the prospect of extension of the American Loan in July in an interview with Lew Douglas, the American Ambassador in London, but the proposal apparently fell on deaf ears. FO800/514/US/47/30/, 31/7/47, meeting between Bevin and Douglas.

Paradoxically, as the prospects for European security and reconstruction improved with the progressive commitment of the United States during 1947, the Foreign Office was faced with the overwhelming problem of sustaining Britain's status as a world power as the economic situation deteriorated. As 'Stocktaking II' had concluded, it was 'dangerous luxury' to consider too great an independence from the United States, but in the situation pertaining this is exactly what Bevin was now forced to consider.

The Foreign Secretary proposed to investigate what raw materials the United States were short of, such as, 'Copper, lead, sisal and possible demands for palm nuts...but there must be many others', even the discovery of diamonds in Tanganyika might be an advantage to be exploited not only to the advantage of British industry, but as a source of export the United States.⁴³

Bevin was determined to preserve British independence; after all if the Labour Government were to preside over the terminal decline of British influence when the country had given so much to achieve victory in the Second World War it would have been electoral suicide. However, perhaps fortuitously for Anglo-American relations, the idea of exploiting colonial resources came to a head when the Cabinet decided, in March 1948, 'there was no alternative to a policy of full support for cooperation in West Europe' even though this would mean 'changes' at some cost 'in the [economic] structure of the United Kingdom...'⁴⁴ Only three months before this decision Ernest

⁴³ FO800/54/US/47/30, Bevin to Attlee, 7/7/47.

⁴⁴ Kent, J., *British Imperial Strategy and the Origins of the Cold War 1944-49*, 1993, p. 174, quoting from CAB 128/12 CM (48), 8/3/48. Kent's well-researched analysis is recommended as the best source for Britain's policy with respect to an imperial strategy to allay the economic, political and diplomatic dilemmas confronting the Foreign Office and the government.

Bevin, in a speech to the House Commons, was however still promoting the idea of the exploitation of Colonial resources. (See below.)

A further example of Bevin's determination to preserve British independence and status, even at the expense of offending the United States, occurred in September 1947. Although Washington had made clear signals that they anticipated a British involvement in a more politically and economically integrated Western Europe, at a meeting with U.S. Congressmen in September 1947 Bevin was at pains to point out that Britain, 'should not simply be lumped together with the rest of Europe.'⁴⁵

It was the failure of the London Council of Foreign Ministers in 1947 to, yet again, reach agreement on German settlement, and its acrimonious adjournment without a date being agreed for a future meeting, which finally drove the Foreign Secretary to adopt Orme Sargent's proposal of July 1945 for a Western Bloc, including the United States. At the end of the meeting he sounded out Marshall and Bidault as to their views of, '...an understanding backed by power, money and resolute action', which would be 'a sort of spiritual federation of the West', which would include both the United States and the Commonwealth. Significantly in view of later developments, (see below), Bevin foresaw that, 'If such a powerful consolidation of the West could be achieved it would then be clear to the Soviet Union that having gone so far they could not advance any further.'⁴⁶

⁴⁵ FO800/514/US/47/39, Minutes of a Meeting of the Mundt-Smith Committee with the Secretary of State, 8/9/47. John Hogan, *The Marshall Plan, America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe 1947-1952*, 1989, provides a detailed account of the American initiative to deepen integration in Western Europe.

⁴⁶ Bullock, p. 498-9, quoting from, FO800/465/FR/47/31, conversation between Bevin and Bidault, 17/12/47.

Clearly fortified by the discussions with his two western compatriots, Bevin swiftly prepared a memorandum for his Cabinet colleagues; 'The First Aim of British Foreign Policy' was a major shift in policy after two years of procrastination and doubts with respect to Western Bloc concept. In his memorandum Bevin was careful, as he had been with Marshall and Bidault, to emphasise the moral and spiritual nature of the alliance, reflecting Sargent's admonitions in the original 'Stocktaking' that only by appearing to act on principle, rather than selfish realism, would the British engage the United States in Europe. At the same time there appears to be an element of confusion about Bevin's policy that had been apparent in 'Stocktaking After VE Day'. Was the new concept of the Western Bloc per se an alliance to maintain the balance of power in Europe, or had it wider ramifications in that it would balance the power of both the Soviet Union and the United States? Bevin, as did Sargent, appears to have opted for both options; whereas he had earlier in his paper commended the scheme as a balance to Soviet force, he concluded that with the aid of both the Americans and the resources of the Colonial Empire, '...it should be possible to develop our own power and influence to equal that of the United States of America and the U.S.S.R.' By taking an immediate spiritual lead it would be possible for Britain, 'to carry out her task in a way which' would clearly demonstrate she would not be 'subservient to the United States or the Soviet Union.'⁴⁷

A measure of the American approval can be gauged from the British Ambassador's telegram to the Foreign Office later in January. Lord Inverchapel noted that the transcript of Bevin's Cabinet paper relayed to the State Department was received with general agreement that even envisaged the satellite countries and the Soviet Union

⁴⁷ CAB 129 C.P. (48) 6, 'The First Aim of British Foreign Policy, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs', 4/1/48.

joining in, although it was clearly unlikely given the current situation. What was more significant for British policy, the State Department did not rule out the possibility of the United States playing a part in the security and defence aspects of the plan. Notably the Americans expected to see a Western European Union linked to the United Nations through Articles 51 and 54 of the Charter.⁴⁸

It would appear by the time the draft was transmitted to Washington that it had been amended; whereas Bevin in his initial paper had laid stress on the need to contain the Soviet Union, which according to Bullock the Cabinet had advised against,⁴⁹ it now apparently substituted the Germans, to which the State Department objected. Bevin could not apparently win in his diplomatic battle to establish the Western Bloc; having satisfied the Cabinet and most of Western Europe by substituting Germany as the *raison d'être* for the security and defence aspects of the plan, the Americans urged the inclusion of Western Germany on the basis that her resources could play a part in the recovery of Western Europe, and was it not true, 'the real threat to the free countries of Western Europe came from further east.'⁵⁰ According to John Kent the references to Britain's true intentions, the goal of independence from the two superpowers, were judiciously removed from the draft presented to Washington;⁵¹ paradoxically the State Department hoped the Western Bloc was proof that Western Europe was demonstrating it could stand on its own feet, and '...should the need arise, to say no firmly, either to Russia or *even to the United States*.'⁵² (Emphasis added.)

⁴⁸ Article 51 of the Charter recognised the right 'of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a member of the United Nations.' Whereas Article 54, required that the Security Council should be kept 'fully informed of activities undertaken or in the contemplation under regional arrangements or by regional agencies for the maintenance of international peace and security.'

⁴⁹ Bullock, p. 517, quoting from CAB C.M. 2 (48), 8/1/48. The Cabinet felt that the right in Europe might be satisfied, but the Socialist elements might be put off.

⁵⁰ FO371/73045/Z561/273/72/5, Inverchapel to the Foreign Office, 21/1/48.

⁵¹ Kent, p. 161.

⁵² Ibid., Inverchapel to Bevin, 21/1/48.

On the day Inverchapel's telegram reached London, 22 January, the Foreign Secretary went public with his proposals, and his conviction that the Soviet Union was not a force for good in Europe. In a speech to the House of Commons Bevin launched his Western Bloc campaign which initially appeared to envisage individual treaties with Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg (the Benelux Grouping) on the same lines as that the Anglo-French Treaty of Dunkirk; after the formation of this nucleus with Britain's 'near neighbours' it would be spread to 'other historic members of European civilisation, including the new Italy...' Historically the ramifications of his speech were immense for it committed Britain to Europe as she had never been before, '...Britain cannot stand outside Europe and regard her problems as quite separate from those of her European neighbours', but the project could not be limited to the geographic confines of the continent; it would necessarily involve, 'the closest collaboration with the Commonwealth and with the associated overseas territories' of Britain and the other colonial powers as their, 'raw materials, food and resources' would need to be turned to the common advantage, both for Europe and themselves. In anticipation of the charge of exploitation, Bevin declared there was no 'conflict between the social and economic development' of those territories 'to the advantage of their peoples and their development as a source of supplies for Western Europe.'

The one essential feature of the speech was Bevin's exclusion of the United States and the part the Americans would play in his project; at this stage he could not be sure to what extent they could be induced to make further commitments to Europe after the momentous Marshall initiative of 1947, to which he paid tribute. (It is possible that as he addressed the House of Commons he had not seen Inverchapel's enthusiastic

telegram.) What was clear from his introduction, the Foreign Secretary had no doubts about the pernicious nature of the Soviet threat to Western Europe after Moscow had used its power over the satellites to prevent them joining the Marshall Plan. Bevin, despite Cabinet disapproval, was still willing to signal that the Western Bloc should play a part in protecting the remaining half of the continent from falling under the influence of the Soviets, who had used every disruptive, 'means at their disposal...to prevent Western Europe taking advantage' of the Marshall Plan. It was these developments, he urged, which required, 'the free nations of Western Europe' to 'now draw together'.⁵³

Undoubtedly Bevin's speech was the catalyst that finally brought to a satisfactory conclusion the many years of discussion as to the need for some sort of Western Alliance, with or without the United States providing some eventual guarantee for its success.⁵⁴ Initially, Trygve Lie's proposal (see chapter one) had foreseen that it should be directed toward the containment of Germany, but the debate in Britain during the war had provoked a dichotomy between the views of the military, who recognised the putative threat in Europe was likely to come from the Soviet Union, and the diplomats who, in the interest of Anglo-Soviet accord and maintaining the wartime alliance,

⁵³ Bullock, pp. 519-20, quoting from Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Documents on International Affairs, 1947-48*, Carlyle, M., (ed.), 1953, which contains the full text, pp. 201-221. Bullock has provided extensive coverage of press comment in his biography. Needless to say, in Bullock's words, the two prominent papers of the left, the *New Statesman* and the *Tribune*, 'were sour and grudging', with the latter questioning the attitude toward Moscow. Both *The Guardian* and the *The Times* were encouraging and drew attention to the, 'remarkable unanimity of public opinion'. The influential *Economist*, in a second editorial ten days after the debate, noted the approval expressed by the chairman of the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Vandenberg, who described the speech as "terrific". However, the editorial warned about expecting immediate results, 'Projects like these need a decade' to come to fruition, and Western Europe was likely to be busy implementing the Marshall Plan for the next five years. Bullock, pp.520-21.

⁵⁴ Don Cook, who was present in the House of Commons as a reporter for the *New York Times*, believed that Bevin's speech 'was the most important...of his five-year tenure as foreign secretary'. Cook, D, *Forging the Alliance, NATO 1945 to 1950*, 1989, p. 116.

preferred that any future Western European security arrangement should be confined to Lie's concept.

Orme Sargent in his seminal document, 'Stocktaking After VE Day', whilst focusing on the Soviet threat still insisted that tripartite co-operation was not only possible but also desirable. At the same time he foresaw that Britain's status in the world was under threat and proposed the formation of a Western Bloc, including the Commonwealth, as a balancing force between the two other Great Powers. The outstanding issue was what part the United States would play in such an arrangement given the possible threat from the east; in the end it was Orme Sargent who had recognised the essential need for an American contribution to European reconstruction and security.

Given that throughout the war this was a major aim of British foreign policy it is surprising that in the two or three years after 1945 there could be any debate as to whether or not this was desirable. The attitude of the Americans did undoubtedly play a part; for the first twelve months of the peace they were far more committed to tripartite co-operation than the British, who were more aware of the Soviet threat, but the sterility of the Council of Foreign Ministers conferences was an important factor in their realisation that little could be gained through co-operation or mediation. But there was still a residual British desire to promote a force in the world which, led by Britain, would contribute to her independence by the utilisation of colonial resources. In March 1948 the Cabinet concluded, 'We should use United States aid to gain time, but our ultimate aim should be to attain a position in which the countries of Western Europe could be independent both of the United States and the Soviet Union.'⁵⁵

⁵⁵ CAB 128 19 (48) 19th. Conclusions 5/3/48.

Western European independence was encouraged by the State Department as Inverchapel's telegram (see above) reveals, but it was the events of 1948 to 1950 which more than any diplomacy contributed to a change in attitude by both the British, and the Americans. Though the eventual signing of the Brussels Pact, a direct result of Bevin's House of Commons speech, went some way to encouraging a belief on the part of the United States that Western Europe was prepared to take its own destiny in hand, the deterioration of the European security after the communist coup in Prague and the eruption of the Berlin crisis served to concentrate minds more than any diplomacy could ever do.

The outcome was an outright commitment to the security of Western Europe on the part of the United States through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, a step that brought to fruition long years of Foreign Office policy. However, it was the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, and the deteriorating economic situation in Western Europe, which finally signalled the end to British participation in the emerging economic union; a project which was to be dominated by France. Doubts about the gains, in terms of defence and the economy, which would accrue in joining, what after all was the corollary of Orme Sargent's proposals in 1945 and Bevin's House of Commons speech of January 1948, forced a rethink of British strategy. The idea of a 'Third Force' as a means of achieving independence from the United States and the Soviet Union, particularly the former, was firmly rejected in the summer of 1949 as was made clear in a memorandum from the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook, to the Prime Minister in May 1950.

Brook, apparently reacting to a statement the previous evening from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Stafford Cripps, that the 'Third Force' should be part of Britain's strategy of freeing herself from the, 'political and economic hegemony' of the United States, reminded the Prime Minister that, whereas the concept had been advocated as an alternative to Anglo-American co-operation, it had been definitely rejected by Ministers before the Washington talks the previous autumn, and previously had been 'discussed and discarded' at a meeting of the Economic Policy Committee on 7 July 1949.⁵⁶ (The 'Washington talks' referred to by Brook presumably were a series of tripartite meetings, between the United States, Canada and Britain in September 1949, which discussed the latter's continuing economic crisis. Both Cripps and Bevin had travelled to the United States to attend, respectively a meeting of the International Monetary Fund and a meeting of NATO foreign ministers, and Brook may have generalised rolling all of the meetings together. The Foreign Secretary also attended a meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York. (There is full account the tripartite talks in Bullock, *Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary*, pp. 716-20.)

Crucially, for the British, although the integration of Western Europe both militarily and economically was attractive, there could be little doubt that without a German

⁵⁶ *DBPO*, srs. II, vol. II, pp. 227-8, Sir Norman Brook to the Prime Minister, 5/5/1950.

Cripps had made it clear at an informal meeting of Ministers in the Prime Minister's room at the House of Commons on 4 May that he disagreed with the apparent abandonment of the 'Third Force' concept as a means to free Britain from American hegemony. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

Further evidence that the Western Bloc concept was no longer a serious feature of Foreign Office policy emerges from a brief for the British delegation to the London Conferences later in the month. The conclusions of the paper were summarised as: the Commonwealth alone could not form a 'Third World Power' equal to the United States and the Soviet Union; solidarity of the Commonwealth was more likely to be promoted by a general consolidation of the west rather than by the, 'formation of Third World Power independent of America'; a weak neutral Western Europe was not only undesirable, whereas a strong independent entity was impracticable without the remilitarization of Germany; the Atlantic Pact (NATO) offered the best hope for Western European security, allowing the latter to hopefully regain its economic strength which might allow a measure of independence from the economic and military might of the United States, but the 'two areas' would 'remain interdependent. Finally, it was concluded that the United Kingdom would have, 'an increasingly important part to play

contribution a 'Third Force' could have done little to check a Soviet advance into Western Europe. Even with a German presence it would probably only delay the advance of the Red Army until the Americans could once more mobilise and come to the rescue. So far the only tangible American commitment to Western Europe was economic, the security aspect was covered by NATO but only to the extent of an agreement under Article V that committed all of the signatories to the alliance to support of any one country facing a military threat. The United States had still not committed any forces to Western European defence other than the occupying divisions in Germany, and, during the Berlin crisis, a wing of B29 bombers (assumed to be armed with atomic bombs) moved to forward positions in East Anglia.

By early 1950 the Americans were increasingly aware of the strategic importance of Britain and the Commonwealth to the containment of the Soviet Union throughout the world, but the first intimation of the need for a closer Anglo-American bond did not apparently emerge from the State Department. In February the Economic Minister in the Washington Embassy, Sir L. Rowan brought the attention of the Treasury to a conversation with his American counterparts in which mention had been made of the, 'possibility of a working partnership between the U.S. and the U.K.'⁵⁷ The Americans were seriously concerned about the consequences for Britain's world role as the dollar gap continued to deplete the country's economic resources compromising any part the latter might play in the world balance of power. At the same time the Americans saw it as crucial that Britain continued to play a significant part in the integration of Western Europe.

in the consolidated West', but must seek 'to maintain its special relationship with the United States. Ibid., p. 63, 'Brief for the U.K. Delegation', *A Third World Power or Western Consolidation*, 19/4/50.

Bevin equally understood this when he outlined his ‘three main pillars’ policy to the Cabinet in the early summer of 1950, ‘the Commonwealth in some degree, Western Europe and the United States’ would each contribute to Britain’s standing in the world very much as Orme Sargent had suggested in 1945.⁵⁸ Clearly, by 1950 British policy appeared to have changed little since ‘Stocktaking After VE Day’. In April a memorandum to the Permanent Under-Secretary’s Committee came to similar conclusions after accepting that the basics of British foreign policy were determined by, ‘certain fundamental factors’: the world role; the lack of self-sufficiency of the economy; and, as a world security system did not exist Britain, and the non-communist world faced an external threat. In response to these factors the major objectives of foreign policy should be: the maintenance of the world role, whilst retaining, ‘the highest possible standard of living’; to maintain the structure of the Commonwealth; to maintain the special relationship; to consolidate ‘the whole “Western” democratic system; to resist ‘Soviet Communism’; and to ensure the Middle East and Asia were, ‘stable, prosperous and friendly.’⁵⁹

Despite the apparent commitment to the European ‘democratic system’, by 1950 the Foreign Office was much attracted toward the American proposals for an Anglo-American accord. It was becoming increasingly clear that Britain was unwilling to go along with the gathering integrationist mood of the rest of Western Europe, even though Bevin supported a general customs union. The drift toward a more atlanticist policy, with the Anglo-American ‘special relationship’ underwriting NATO as the

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 4, Sir L. Rowan to E. A. Hitchman, 14/2/50.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 261 Calendar I to no. 74, Mr. Bevin’s brief for Cabinet Meeting objectives at London Conference, 7/5/50. The London Conferences were a series of Anglo-American bipartite meetings, preceding Anglo-American-Franco meetings, which culminated in a full meeting of the North Atlantic Council in the late spring and early summer of 1950 in London.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.158, ‘Memorandum for the Permanent Under-Secretary’s Committee’, 27/4/50.

preferred body for western integration, rather than the French proposals for economic integration as envisaged in the Schuman Plan, was given impetus at the bi-lateral meetings in London during the spring of 1950.

A brief for the United Kingdom delegation to the Anglo-American talks emphasised the importance of the American approach suggesting, 'that we should aim in the first place at establishing an understanding about the basic relationship between the two countries', and that it was 'the first time since the war that they have approached us as partners on the most general issues of policy.' The paper acknowledged that it had been:

...evident for some time past that as the United States moved out into world affairs, she was becoming increasingly conscious, first that the strength and prosperity of the United Kingdom, both in her own right and as the leading member both of the Commonwealth and of Western Europe, was an essential factor in the security of the United States; and second, that the United States cannot get the main lines of their foreign policy right, whether in Europe, the Middle East, or Asia, without our help.⁶⁰

The optimism expressed by the Foreign Office was confirmed by the outcome of the bi-lateral talks: on 6 May a Foreign Office memorandum outlined the conclusions of the Anglo-American talks, noting that it was, '...the common purpose of the two countries to build up the strength and closer unity of the non-communist world...In working towards this purpose special burdens and responsibilities fall upon the United States and the United Kingdom', not only would the two countries bear 'the brunt of action in the event of war', they had common interests 'not only in the Atlantic area but throughout the world.' In the light of these 'special responsibilities' it was acknowledged that in the case of the United Nations, despite the apparent doubts about its efficacy expressed by the Foreign Office (see above), there was agreement on the

need for both the United States and Britain to avoid, 'voting against the other' and the practice of consultation prior to important meetings of the United Nations 'should be extended'.⁶¹

Undoubtedly the Anglo-American accord was a very comprehensive and conclusive arrangement. Despite some major upsets, it has stood the test of many years, not least the British refusal to assume leadership in the economic integration of Western Europe, despite Washington's wishes to the contrary. Significantly the new 'special relationship' was to a great extent a reversal of roles; whereas Orme Sargent in 'Stocktaking After VE Day', and subsequent Foreign Office policy, had envisaged a major role for the United States in the world, particularly in Western Europe, to augment Britain's declining status as a Great Power, it was now the Americans who looked to the support of Britain and the Commonwealth to build up, 'the strength and closer unity of the non-Communist world.'⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 70, 'Brief for the U.K. Delegation, the general approach in bipartite conversations with the American delegation', 21/4/50.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 242-3, 'Agreed Anglo-American Report', *Continued Consultation and Co-ordination of Policy*, 6/5/50.

⁶² Ibid., p. 242.

CONCLUSION

During the Second World War, British foreign policy was extensively preoccupied with creating, then holding together, an alliance system to support the campaign against Germany, but the Foreign Office was aware of the need to engage the United States in Europe more permanently once the conflict was over. This was driven by the need to balance and contain a resurgent Germany, the Americans being the only power, beside the Soviet Union, who could provide the economic and military might to do so. The British were determined that the events of 1919, when the United States had returned to isolationism as a result of Woodrow Wilson's misjudged attempts to engage the Americans internationally had failed, should not be repeated.

However, policy was uncertain, and at times confused by the volatile nature of American political and public opinion. Roosevelt, who had attended the Versailles peace conference and supported Wilson's idealism, was a committed internationalist, but there was a deep political and public desire in the United States to remain detached from world affairs. By the end of the war, the Foreign Office had capitalised on what influence it had in Washington, and the United States was fully committed to the United Nations despite the nagging doubts, that had prevailed at times in London. It could be argued that the Foreign Office only encouraged the ideas already emerging from Washington, but as for a commitment to Europe, which was central to British policy, any such hopes had clearly been dashed at the Tehran conference when the President had made it clear that the American army would be withdrawn from Germany as expeditiously as possible.

The increased interest in a Western Bloc alliance in 1944 only reflected the failure of the British to make any inroads on Washington's determination to pursue a policy of what can only be seen as neutrality in Europe. Indeed, both the Roosevelt administration and, initially Truman's, were determined to pursue a policy of co-operation with Moscow and any involvement in a Western European security arrangement would probably have been counter productive. The Foreign Office initiative of 1944 stalled for much the same reason, although there was little political interest in the Western Bloc with the Prime Minister firmly determined that Britain's security and interests were best served by a transatlantic alliance.

As for the Soviet Union, it is clear that policy vacillated; the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister were clearly relieved to finally have an ally in the war despite the deep ideological differences between the two countries, but it is significant that Churchill did not rush-off to Moscow as he did to Washington after Pearl Harbour.¹ The Foreign Secretary finally undertook the hazardous journey only in December 1941 in response to Stalin's demands for a discussion of war aims: the latter was of course deeply concerned that there should be a Second Front in Europe to relieve the pressure on the Red Army.

Although a Anglo-Soviet twenty year alliance was signed in London after the visit of the Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, in April 1942, the Foreign

¹ The British were quick to instigate the treacherous Arctic convoys, but there was a feeling in London that the Red Army, debilitated by the purges of the late 1930s, would not last long against the Germans. It was September before there was a high-ranking visit to Moscow; Lord Beaverbrook, Minister of Supply, accompanied by the American envoy Averell Harriman, was dispatched to discuss the supply of aid to the beleaguered Soviets. Rothwell, p.82.

Office were always suspicious of Moscow's intentions with respect to Eastern Europe. Consequently, the Anglo-Soviet relationship was always tense to say the least, though consideration was given to including the Russians in a European alliance to contain Germany, (see chapter one). However, both Eden and, initially his successor Ernest Bevin, were determined to continue the tripartite alliance, as it appeared to offer the greatest opportunity for a post-war international settlement.

Once the war was over Britain's foreign policy options were limited by the state of the economy, and her inferior position as a junior partner in the new World order. Economically Britain was dependent on the United States for support, and as the onerous terms of the Loan Agreement of 1946 indicated the Americans were not prepared to do the British any favours.

As Orme Sargent suggested in 'Stocktaking After VE Day' the Soviet Union became the greatest threat to stability in Europe; Moscow's failure to install democratic regimes in the occupied countries, particularly Poland whose independence was sacrosanct given that Britain had ostensibly entered the war to defend it. Finally Bevin, provoked by Soviet intransigence to settle the problem of Germany at the 1947 Council of Ministers Meeting in London, accepted the need for a Western Bloc to counter the Russian threat, although quite what form it would have taken was somewhat ambiguous given the prevarications as to whether the United States would be a member, despite Washington's approval of the scheme. However, this was eventually superseded by the formation of NATO and an American commitment to the security of Western Europe.

For much of the time in the last five years of the decade the Foreign Office reacted to events rather than shaping them, although Bevin's response to Marshall's proposals for a massive injection of dollars and material to the devastated European economy was inspired. The eventual American commitment to Western European security was driven more by a desire to calm the nerves of a continent unsettled by two major events in 1948: the Prague coup of February and the start of the Soviet blockade of Berlin in June. However, in fairness to the Foreign Secretary and his colleagues the groundwork had already been done by patient diplomacy beforehand.

By 1950 the Americans recognised the value of Britain and the Empire to the worldwide campaign to contain communism, and at the London Conferences affirmed the special relationship. But whereas during the war the British had convinced themselves they could dominate the relationship using the might of the United States to their own end, the positions had reversed and it was now the Americans who were using what influence and power Britain had left.

It would have been hard to perceive of such an outcome given the confusing, and desperate, situation the Foreign Office confronted when Trygve Lie made his original proposal for shared bases in November 1940. However, as William Wallace has observed in his study of British foreign policy during the 1970s:

Clear and final decisions are as rare in foreign policy-making as in much domestic policy. Important changes in policy evolve out of an accumulation of small decisions, of adjustments to circumstances and reactions to situations, clearer in hindsight than in the making. Foreign policy in Britain, as in other large industrial states, evolves within an organisational framework in which the personalities of those responsible, the role they are

called upon to play, the objectives they pursue, and the domestic and international pressures which they perceive interact, to form what the outside observer may see as discrete decisions.²

The incremental nature of British foreign policy, the influence of personalities and external events, are clearly evident in the years covered by this study. Both Gladwyn Jebb's Four Power Plan and Orme Sargent's 'Stocktaking After VE Day' were examples of the deliberative process, which finally resulted in influential documents destined to markedly shape the post-war situation.

As a result of Britain exploiting the findings of these documents, reacting to various initiatives and events whilst playing a rather weak hand, given its both declining economy and diplomatic influence, successfully the United States was not only, somewhat coincidentally, committed to a World security organisation, but also fully engaged in the restoration and defence of Western Europe.

² Wallace, W., *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain*, 1977, p. 6.

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